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DIALOGUE JOURNALS: A NON-THREATENING WAY TO CORRECT WRITTEN
LANGUAGE ERRORS

by

Sara Brooke Morrell

An Independent Study
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of:

Master of Science in Deaf Education

May 21, 2010

Washington University School of Medicine
Program in Audiology and Communication Sciences

Approved by:

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Abstract: The goals of the present study are: to determine if dialogue journals are an effective activity within a balanced literacy program to improve on written language errors in students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

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Sara B. Morrell
May 21, 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following contributors to this study, without whom this project would not have been possible:

Lynda Berkowitz of the Program in Audiology and Communication Sciences, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Missouri, for her patience, time, effort and guidance throughout this study;

Julia West of the Program in Audiology and Communication Sciences, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Missouri, for serving as a reader and implementing this study in her classroom;

Lauren Abel of Central Institute for the Deaf, St. Louis, Missouri, for implementing this study in her classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

Spoken language maps directly onto print. Students who have success with oral language also develop better-written language (Musselman and Szanto, 1998). Children who are deaf and hard of hearing do not have the access to sound that is needed to develop a spoken language at the same rate as children with typical hearing. Students who are deaf and hard of hearing spend their early years in education trying to reach a level of proficiency in their native language that compares to the abilities of their hearing peers. Research shows that students who are deaf and hard of hearing are generally four to five years behind in language development when compared to peers with normal hearing (Blamey et al., 2001). Adequate development of language is vital for children to learn to read. For children who are deaf and hard of hearing their language delay affects their development of literacy skills (Cole and Flexer, 2007).

Some students who are deaf and hard of hearing begin to learn the writing process when they are not yet proficient in spoken language, which makes writing a difficult task to master (Robertson et al., 2004). Fifty percent of children who are deaf and hard of hearing graduate from secondary school only achieving a fourth grade reading level. This supports the theory that students who are deaf and hard of hearing develop literacy without mastering complex language (Traxler, 2000). Recent research shows these students have weaknesses in grammar, spelling and the ability to write narratives (Musselman 2000). In a society that rates personal success largely on whether one possesses high levels of literacy skills, students with hearing loss are at a disadvantage compared to their peers with typical hearing (Robertson et al., 2004).

Years ago a functional reading level was considered to be at fourth or fifth grade. In today's information driven society an eleventh or twelfth grade reading level is important to possess in order to function in the workplace (Robertson et al., 2004). Students who are deaf and hard of hearing are not reaching this level of proficiency in literacy. It is the job of educators in deaf education to close this gap and to equip students who are deaf and hard of hearing with the necessary literacy skills to function in today's society.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Language Development

In order to understand why deaf and hard of hearing children have difficulties learning to read and write, it is important to understand how deaf children acquire language. Recent research indicates that the most effective way to acquire language (speech), reading and cognitive skills is through the ability to hear (Cole and Flexer, p. 2, 2007). The listening experiences that begin in infancy and even in utero, are crucial for adequate language development. Adequate language development is vital for reading. (Cole and Flexer, 2007). Deaf children do not have the same access to sound as typically hearing children. Children who are deaf and hard of hearing that learn language through American Sign Language acquire language differently than hearing children as well as deaf children who have access to sound through technology. Children who are immersed in a language either spoken or visual are able to learn the semantic and syntactic structures that govern that language (Gioia, 2001). This literature review will focus on the language and literacy development of children who are deaf and hard of hearing who are learning spoken language through listening.

Typical hearing children start listening to environmental sounds at about twenty weeks in utero, stimulating their central auditory pathways and preparing the brain to recognize the child's native sounds of speech (Cole and Flexer, 2007). The brain has the ability to recognize speech sounds of a child's native language while tuning out speech sounds that are not part of the native language (Cole and Flexer, 2007). As the brain distinguishes speech sounds specific to the mother tongue it also improves the ability for

the brain to recognize phonetic characteristics required for the infant to develop language (Cole and Flexer, 2007). For most typically developing hearing children language learning comes as automatically as learning to walk. Biologically, humans are predetermined to learn a language and have the ability to produce sounds specific to that language (Cole and Flexer, 2007). The next question to consider is, “How do we nurture what biologically is already predisposed?”

Hearing children of hearing parents learn language by being completely immersed in their native tongue (Gioia, 2001). Children who are diagnosed with hearing loss, typically miss out on hearing the first twenty weeks in utero as well as the first few months after they are born until they are fit with proper hearing devices. Even with the proper fitting of hearing aids in the early months following birth, the degree of hearing loss will affect the child’s quality of access to sound (Cole and Flexer, 2007). In order for the development of typical speech and language skills, auditory pathways need to be stimulated at an early age and often (Cole and Flexer, 2007). Providing deaf children access to sound as soon as possible and immersing deaf and hard of hearing children in an environment that is saturated with language from capable language users, allows deaf children to develop language in the same manner as typically hearing peers (Gioia, 2001).

Language is not just the act of imitation. Children construct language from what they hear and make changes depending on feedback and experience (Gunning, 2008). An example of children constructing language from feedback is when young language learners add a past tense /ed/ to verb forms that are irregular. Eventually children understand that when talking about Mommy going to the store, the child can say “went” instead of “goed.” Another factor that affects the acquisition of language is the amount

and the type of language the child is surrounded with. The amount that parents talk to their children directly affects their language and school abilities (Hart and Risely, 1995). In their study, Hart and Risely determined the importance of descriptive language to label objects and describe actions to expose children to more complex language (Hart and Risely, 1995).

Language Development Affects Literacy

Children who are deaf and hard of hearing begin to demonstrate delays in language at an early age and these delays can persist throughout their development (Gioia, 2001). There are four stages in the process of acquiring language. The first phase concerns the act of acquiring a “face-to-face language” through the use of the language itself (Mayer, 2007). The development of a face-to-face language is the prerequisite for literacy and cognition. (Mayer, 2007). Phase two moves from intermental communication (a means to describe the world around the child) to intramental communication, where the child begins to use language as a tool for thinking. In this phase, the acquired language shapes cognition. Children will think in the language in which they are fluent, later leading to successful literacy development (Mayer, 2007). In the third phase, children are proficient in aspects of syntax in their spoken language that they are then able to express in print as well (Mayer, 2007). It is in this phase that children, who are deaf and hard of hearing who do not have a proficient understanding and use of spoken language, have difficulty relating spoken language to print. The concept of print includes both reading and writing and is also termed literacy. The fourth stage is described as the phase beyond a functional level of literacy and is more concerned with literacy in terms

of education. A functional level of literacy is considered to be at a sixth grade level. In the fourth stage, children achieve a higher level of literacy necessary to advance in academics (Mayer, 2007).

In 2007, Connie Mayer conducted a study focusing on the emergent literacy skills of preschool children who are deaf and hard of hearing in a total communication program. Through her research, Mayer discovered that children that enter school with strong language abilities, including a broad vocabulary, syntax, discourse and phonemic awareness, have an easier time moving from a spoken language to text-based literacy (Mayer, 2007). However, many students who are deaf and hard of hearing enter school with language abilities below their hearing peers. This supports the statistic that fifty percent of deaf students who graduate from secondary school only achieve a fourth grade reading level (Traxler, 2000). Traxler's study included students who are deaf and hard of hearing who rely on American Sign Language or another form of visual communication to acquire language as well as children who are deaf and hard of hearing that communicate through spoken language. With the recent implementation of Universal Newborn Hearing Screenings, children with hearing loss are being diagnosed, fit with amplification, and enrolled in early intervention services at an early age, which ultimately raises expectations for children with a hearing loss to develop language and literacy skills that are comparable to their hearing peers (Mayer, 2007). Many children who are deaf begin to learn to read and write without a firm understanding of spoken language making the development of literacy more difficult in comparison to children who have complex understanding of their language before learning literacy skills (Mayer, 2007). Future

research needs to be conducted to analyze the developmental process that children go through who are deaf and have received early intervention to acquire literacy skills.

How do typically hearing children develop the skills necessary to become fluent in literacy? “Reading is the process of constructing meaning from print; we cannot read what we cannot understand” (Gunning, 2008). The act of learning to read requires the reader to have phonemic awareness, decoding skills and the ability to bring personal experience to what they are reading (Gunning, 2008). Phonological awareness is the process, in which children learn that spoken language consists of words and sounds. Typical hearing children develop this concept in the early stages of emergent literacy (Hermans, Knoors, Ormel and Verhoeven, 2007).

Vocabulary plays a key role in understanding text and contributes to the end goal of reading, the ability to take away meaning from print (Gunning, 2008). Knowledge of vocabulary is predominate in the beginning stages of literacy development, when knowledge of the alphabetic principle will not help the reader understand the text (Hermans, Knoors, Ormel and Verhoeven, 2007). Children who are deaf and hard of hearing have been found to have smaller spoken language vocabularies, which directly translates to their knowledge of vocabulary within literacy context (Hermans, Knoors, Ormel and Verhoeven, 2007). Typically hearing children are able to use the alphabetic principle to decode a new word that they already know in their spoken language (Hermans, Knoors, Ormel and Verhoeven, 2007). Often, children who are deaf and hard of hearing have the skills to decode words, but if these words are not in their oral vocabulary, they fail to understand them. It is not until children gain more experience with text that they are able to rely on the context of what they are reading to help

understand unfamiliar vocabulary. Through the use of contextual clues, readers can often figure out the meaning of an unknown word (Hermans, Knoors, Ormel and Verhoeven, 2007). Relying on contextual clues to teach new vocabulary can only be effective when the reader understands the language in which they are reading in its most complex characteristics. Typically hearing children comprehend morphologic, semantic and syntactic characteristics specific to their spoken language. This information automatically draws a relationship to the written word. Children who are deaf and hard of hearing do not come to the process of learning to read with the same level of mastery in language, phonological skills, and vocabulary as hearing children which hinders deaf and hard of hearing children from forming relationships between spoken and written forms of language (Hermans, Knoors, Ormel and Verhoeven, 2007). Although a large vocabulary helps in the process of learning to read, a basic understanding of syntax is necessary in order to use contextual cues to build vocabulary knowledge later (Musselman, 2000).

Phonological awareness combined with orthographical awareness has been termed the alphabetic principle. The alphabetic principle recognizes that the written form of language corresponds with speech sounds of the native language. The issue with the alphabetic principle is that it cannot stand alone and support the development of fluent literacy. Studies have shown that knowledge of the alphabetic principle must be combined with a wide vocabulary in order for readers to become fluent in literacy (Hermans, Knoors, Ormel and Verhoeven, 2007). It is important to look at why children with a hearing loss may have difficulties developing the skills necessary to master the alphabetic principle. The alphabetic principle is a system based on the sounds of speech specific to a language, and has a direct relationship with the skills required in reading

(Perfetti & Sandak, 2000). The alphabetic principle enables children to learn to read in two ways. First the principle draws a relationship between phonemes and orthographic symbols or letters. With awareness of phonemes, children are equipped with the skills needed to decode written language. Children who are deaf and hard of hearing do not always have access to sound that will allow them to utilize the alphabetic principle while developing their reading skills. Perfetti and Sandak (2000) looked at research that has been done to see if children who are deaf and hard of hearing use phonemic awareness in the same way that typically hearing children do when learning to read. Through their reviews of literature, Perfetti and Sandak (2000) found that children who are deaf and hard of hearing who were educated in an oral communication program, were delayed in patterns of phonological development. Oddly enough the delays were not considered to be abnormal. The results are considered to occur in an accurate developmental sequence since phonological competence develops later in life for children who are deaf and hard of hearing. Charles Perfetti and Rebecca Sandak, also found evidence that showed some children who are deaf and hard of hearing are sensitive to rhyming patterns, which is a phonologic activity (Perfetti and Sandak, 2000). Overall the task of determining if children who are deaf and hard of hearing use phonology in specific tasks is very difficult. It is possible that some children who are deaf or hard of hearing have phonological skills and can use them accurately (Perfetti and Sandak, 2000). Since children who are deaf and hard of hearing do not have the same access to sound as typically hearing peers, some researchers believe deaf children are more visual learners. If they do have phonemic awareness, researchers believe that deaf children do not use their knowledge in the same way as typically hearing children (Perfetti and Sandak,

2000). There is not enough evidence to determine how children who are deaf and hard of hearing access their phonologic skills. However, considering the recent advances in technology it is likely that children who are deaf and hard of hearing who have received early intervention, along with an early diagnosis, will be able to use the alphabetic principle in the same ways as their typically hearing peers.

Literacy encompasses the ability to become fluent in reading and writing. “Fluency is freedom from word identification problems that might hinder comprehension in silent reading or the expression of ideas in oral reading” (Gunning, 2008). Written language contains the same semantic, syntactic and morphological characteristics that are included in spoken language as well as reading (Hermans, Ormel, Knoors and Verhoeven, 2007). Reading, writing and spoken language are all closely related, building on the basic concepts of language to acquire reading and writing skills. There have been many different theories on what is the best way to teach literacy to typically hearing children as well as children who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The most recent theories consist of the “top down, bottom- up and interactionist approaches” (Gunning, 2008). The “bottom-up approach” consists of breaking the reading process up into small parts and teaching the easier parts first. The easier parts of reading are considered to be the phonics skills, learning the names of the individual letters and then the sounds each letter makes before working on more complex skills needed in literacy learning (Gunning, 2008). Utilizing the “bottom-up approach” teaches children the skills they need by breaking them down into smaller parts. This strategy allows the teacher to identify where a child has a break down in comprehension and

remedy that confusion (Gunning, 2008). There are very few teachers of reading that solely rely on the “bottom-up approach.”

In the “top-down approach” theorists believe that learning to read is the same as learning a language. A holistic natural approach that includes immersion in the task is what a child needs to learn the necessary skills to be fluent in reading (Gunning, 2008). “Top-down” theorists do not think it is necessary to teach all the components of phonics. They believe that the type of instruction needed to teach phonics fragments the reading process, making the process an abstract concept. Teachers that use the “top-down” approach educate their students on using context clues, background knowledge and initial consonant clues in the reading process (Gunning, 2008).

The interactionist theory borrows practices from both the top-down and bottom-up approaches. Interactionists believe that phonics should be taught systematically in the beginning, but not as intensely as in the bottom-up theory, to avoid fragmenting the learning process. This approach also provides opportunities for students to learn to read and write through a holistic natural setting, making writing for a purpose the goal. The key to an interactionist approach is having a balance between holistic practices along with phonics instruction. This approach is sometimes termed balanced literacy.

Balanced Literacy

Balanced literacy is a term that is used to describe an approach used in teaching reading and writing to students that combines practices from a “top-down and bottom-up” literacy program. Richard Allington designed balanced literacy to be a program that

balances skill instruction within context of a holistic style or whole language style of teaching (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002).

Michael Pressley et al., (2002) conducted a study of the impact of balanced literacy instruction on students in a public school in up-state New York. Pressley et al., (2002) describes the nine components that make up a balanced literacy program: phonemic and alphabetic principle awareness, word recognition instruction, vocabulary instruction, comprehension strategies, self-monitoring, extensive reading, relating prior knowledge to text, writing instruction and motivating reading and writing. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that words are made up of sounds that can be separated and blended together. The alphabetic principle is the awareness that speech sounds are represented by letters of the alphabet to form words (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). Phonemic awareness instruction has been shown to predict how well a child will succeed in reading in the higher-grade levels. Students who receive this instruction early on in their education have less reading difficulties when in the higher grades (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). Not only does phonemic awareness improve reading skills, it also helps to improve spelling skills, allowing students the ability to sound out a word, which they are trying to spell. The next component of a balanced literacy program is instruction in word recognition, which includes synthetic phonics, whole word approach and a program that uses analogies for unknown words, like “Word-ID” (Lenz and Hughes, 1990). Synthetic phonics is the process of using the alphabetic principle to sound out a word. Research has shown that intense instruction on synthetic phonics can improve the word recognition skills in children who struggle with learning to read. The whole word approach teaches sight

words to children and can be linked to the “Dick and Jane” books. The “Word-ID” program teaches students to break down the unknown word into smaller words that they already know, and then sound out the word correctly (Lenz and Hughes, 1990). Very few studies have been found that concentrate on proving if synthetic phonics or a word analogy program is more effective in achieving word recognition skills, but with either strategy the key is embedding it into a full literacy program, like balanced literacy.

Vocabulary instruction is important for comprehension of text. Students cannot read what they cannot understand, making vocabulary instruction very important for children who are deaf and hard of hearing. Typically hearing children learn the meaning of words through experience or within the context of the text, yet often the meanings that children infer from the text are wrong (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). If typically hearing children have this problem, it can only be assumed that children who are deaf and hard of hearing that are learning to read without a complete knowledge of their spoken language will also have this problem. Explicitly teaching children vocabulary words that are important in an upcoming passage and high frequency words, will help the children with overall comprehension of text. Since vocabulary knowledge is key for comprehension, educators must instruct their students on different strategies to ensure comprehension of what they are reading. Good readers are aware of what they are reading and know if they understand it or not. They employ different strategies to help them figure out what they did not understand. Pressley, et al. (2002) go on to describe that in a balanced literacy program, students learn to use a variety of comprehension strategies such as, predicting what will happen, asking questions while reading, seeking clarification, summarizing the text and constructing a mental image of

the text. Educators need to be aware that instruction of comprehension strategies should be taught with modeling and explanation of the strategy followed by a good amount of practice for the students. Skills should also be taught in a scaffolding manner (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). The ability to recognize if you understand what you are reading is part of self-monitoring, which is an important skill in the development of literacy skills. Self-monitoring is nurtured in a balanced literacy program by teaching the students to recognize if their decoding of words makes sense in the passage. If students are confused by something they read, they will know to employ comprehension strategies that they have learned in order to understand the text (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). Extensive reading is the next component of balanced literacy and involves the immersion of literacy within the classroom. Students are able to expand their vocabulary and world knowledge through books and articles that they read, which is why it is very important to include literature that can be considered global (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). Background knowledge is very important to an individual during the reading process. In order to relate to a character or understand the scene of a book one must access their prior knowledge to make that relation. Even good readers sometimes fail to relate prior knowledge to what they are reading. Balanced literacy promotes the encouragement of relating what the children already know to the text by asking “why”. When students ask “why” throughout the text they are more likely to relate prior knowledge to explain what is happening in the passage. As mentioned earlier, reading is not the only skill included in literacy, writing and reading go hand in hand in the development of literacy. Instruction in writing is an important part of a balanced literacy program. Learning to write, like learning to read and

speaking is achieved through immersion. Immersion in the writing process involves teaching three steps to students: 1) plan before you write 2) write a draft and 3) revise the draft looking for grammar and meaning (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). Writers Workshop is a writing curriculum that teaches students the process of writing within immersion of literacy (Calkins, 1986). This type of curriculum would be considered part of a balanced literacy program. In addition to teaching the writing process, teachers can include the use of dialogue journals as part of their writing curriculum. Dialogue journals are a written conversation between the teacher and the student, where the teacher does not correct any of the students' writing. Dialogue journals allow the students the ability to write independently on a daily basis (Fernandes, 1999). The last component of balanced literacy is one of the most important; motivation, which is specifically critical to students who struggle with literacy development. There are five strategies that an educator can use in the classroom to promote motivation. One is encouraging students to be successful. If students know that the teacher believes they can succeed, the students will believe that as well. Another strategy is to provide an abundance of rich print and reading experiences, Read-alouds are a great way to expose children to a story that is fun and exciting but may be above their reading level. Providing students with the opportunity to write about topics of their choice can motivate the students to become engaged in the writing process since they enjoy sharing their ideas and thoughts. The last two strategies include the connection of literacy instruction with all content area activities and encouraging a classroom environment that promotes cooperative learning instead of competition (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002).

In 2002 a study was conducted that looked at elementary school teachers who specifically taught kindergarten through second grade, to see what approaches they were using in teaching literacy to children in Upstate New York (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). Surveys were sent out to teachers that were recommended by their superiors as having excellent strategies to teach literacy. The surveys asked teachers to indicate strategies used in their classrooms and to describe how they implemented these strategies. The researchers determined that the majority of the teachers nominated as having effective teaching strategies used a balanced literacy approach. Following the first survey the researchers sought more information specific to finding tangible differences between classrooms that engaged in balanced literacy and classrooms that focused their strategies at either end of the spectrum of literacy approaches. The researchers asked districts in up-state New York to nominate two first grade teachers; one who they believed had very effective teaching strategies, and one who was more representative of the majority of first grade teachers in that district. Ten teachers were nominated in total and were divided equally into the two subcategories. Through surveys and observations of the teachers and their classrooms, the researchers divided the teachers into three groups; highly effective, least effective and somewhere in the middle. The three classrooms that were considered to use highly effective teaching strategies also motivated their students in ways that allowed them to be engaged ninety percent of the time (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). The higher achieving classrooms had complete immersion in literacy throughout the day. Everything that the teacher taught was tied to literacy.

Balanced literacy approaches have also been found to help students who initially have difficulty learning to read and write (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). Through the afore mentioned study, the researchers found that the teachers they surveyed used essentially the same teaching strategies contained in a balanced literacy program with students who were struggling with learning to read and write. Skill instruction occurred more often and was more intense with children who struggled with literacy, but students were still immersed in the reading and writing experience. Children who are deaf and hard of hearing learn language through total immersion within that language and through direct instruction. It seems hopeful that these children can learn to read and write effectively when immersed in a balanced literacy curriculum.

Dialogue Journals

In many classrooms around the nation, teachers have used dialogue journals as a way to encourage their students to write. Dialogue journals, also known as interactive journals, are a way for the teacher and students to interact with each other in writing, on an individual basis. There are many different ways a teacher can use interactive journals. One is where the teacher replies to entries that the student writes with freedom of topic. The teacher can also provide the topic or ask the students questions. The students then reply to the teacher's questions and an ongoing conversation takes place. The teacher does not correct the students' writing, however she may try to model the correct spelling or syntax in her own writing (Albertini, 1993). It is up to the students to take responsibility to make any corrections in their response. Conversations between the

teacher and the student can continue for many journal entries or a new conversation can start up without finishing the last conversation.

Dialogue journals have been used with children as young as kindergarten and as old as college students (Bailes, 1999). They are a great way for teachers to learn about their students' interests (Bailes, 1999). Older students have used journals to discuss controversial topics. Dialogue journals can allow students to freely express their opinions in a non-threatening environment. Dialogue journals were used in an educational course for teachers that looked into the many effects of racism (Garmon, 1998). Arthur Garmon (1998) found that his students gained trust in him through their dialogue journals and were more willing to express their ideas freely towards the end of the semester. Students are more likely to explore ideas outside of their comfort zone when they feel safe and trust the environment they are in. Gaining students' trust aids in making the students feel comfortable in expressing their thoughts and feelings (Garmon, 1998).

Dialogue journals are an important way to promote literacy. Not only do students gain practice in writing their ideas, but they also gain practice reading the teacher's responses (Peyton and Seyoum, 1989). Interactive writing activities promote self-monitoring, automaticity of writing and confidence for the student (Wolbers, 2007). Dialogue journals are considered interactive writing because the student and teacher engage in intimate conversation through a written dialogue. The teacher does not tell the student how to correct grammar or spelling. Instead she models the correct use of the child's spoken language. This transfers the responsibility from the teacher to the student, promoting a greater need for self-monitoring by the student. Self-monitoring allows the student to apply all his previous knowledge on accurately displaying characteristics

specific to written language. Through the process of self-monitoring the student can identify where the breakdowns in his writing occur. After the breakdown is identified the student then is equipped with the skills to seek the resources needed to correct the written language error.

Students should write for meaningful purposes. When the students write about a topic that is meaningful to them, they become more engaged in the act of writing itself (Bailes, 1999). Students will want to write more and in return they will become competent in their writing skills. Not only do dialogue journals give students a purpose for their writing, they also help develop meaningful relationships between students and their teachers. Providing students with a positive learning environment is an important part of being a teacher. Developing a good relationship with the students, where they feel safe is a key competent of this kind of environment. When students feel safe in their environment, they are more likely to explore outside of their comfort zones. Dialogue journals build relationships and motivate students to express themselves more freely. Even if they do not know how to spell a specific word or use the correct syntax, students are motivated to dialogue with their teacher because they are not being graded or directly corrected (Bailes, 1999).

Many teachers use dialogue journals as a means for students to express themselves on topics of their own interest. One of the challenges teachers face with using dialogue journals is how to influence their students to write significant entries or responses. Peyton and Seyoum (1989) researched teacher strategies on interactive writing with dialogue journals. The purpose of their study was to determine if a specific strategy could promote communication between teacher and student through journal writing.

Through their study, they concluded that students were more likely to engage and “write more freely when they and the teacher found a topic in common” (Peyton and Seyoum, 1989). Peyton and Seyoum found that the manner in which the teacher responds to the student’s entries can have an influence on how significant the conversation ends up to be. Students tend to write more in response to a teacher topic containing a personal contribution than in response to questions alone (Peyton and Seyoum, 1989). Teachers who would try to prompt responses using questions received systematic answers that were usually very short in nature. Teachers who used statements in their responses were more likely to influence the student to engage in a more meaningful conversation about the topic.

Another study was conducted with younger children that supports the theory that teacher directed questions can hinder the student’s response. Hall and Duffy (1987) found in the dialogue journal writing of a teacher and 5-year old students that when the teacher “was following the way that teachers often talk to children in classrooms, doing all the asking of questions”, the children were simply replying and not actually entering into the dialogue. Later when the teacher began to make statements, the children began “branching out on their own and engaging in meaningful written conversations”. (Hall and Duffy 1987 p.526, 527).

Dialogue journals should not take the place of the instruction of grammar and syntax, but should be used as a comfortable activity where the students can practice the skills that they know (Wolbers, 2007). Interactive journal writing helps promote the sense of an audience as well as provides experience-writing narratives.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Recognizing the average literacy level of students who are deaf and hard of hearing and researching the impact of dialogue journals within a balanced literacy program, raised the questions which prompted this study. The examiner designed this study to examine the effectiveness of dialogue journals with students who are deaf and hard of hearing who use spoken language to communicate. Through research on balanced literacy programs, the examiner recognized that dialogue journals could be effective in promoting literacy within a program that provides instruction on syntax and phonemic awareness. The examiner sought to determine the effectiveness dialogue journals have on correcting written language errors within a balanced literacy program with students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The objective was to investigate if students who are enrolled at Central Institute for the Deaf in St. Louis, Missouri, who have received intensive training in speech, language and listening, would be able to correct written language errors in their own writing by reading the facilitator's responses that model correct syntax and grammar. Introducing dialogue journals in the classrooms at Central Institute for the Deaf built upon the balanced literacy approach that is already being implemented. Currently, students at Central Institute for the Deaf are engaged in multiple writing activities and opportunities to learn different types of formal writing, but do not utilize interactive journals. Dialogue journals gave students and teachers another opportunity to write and improve their literacy skills.

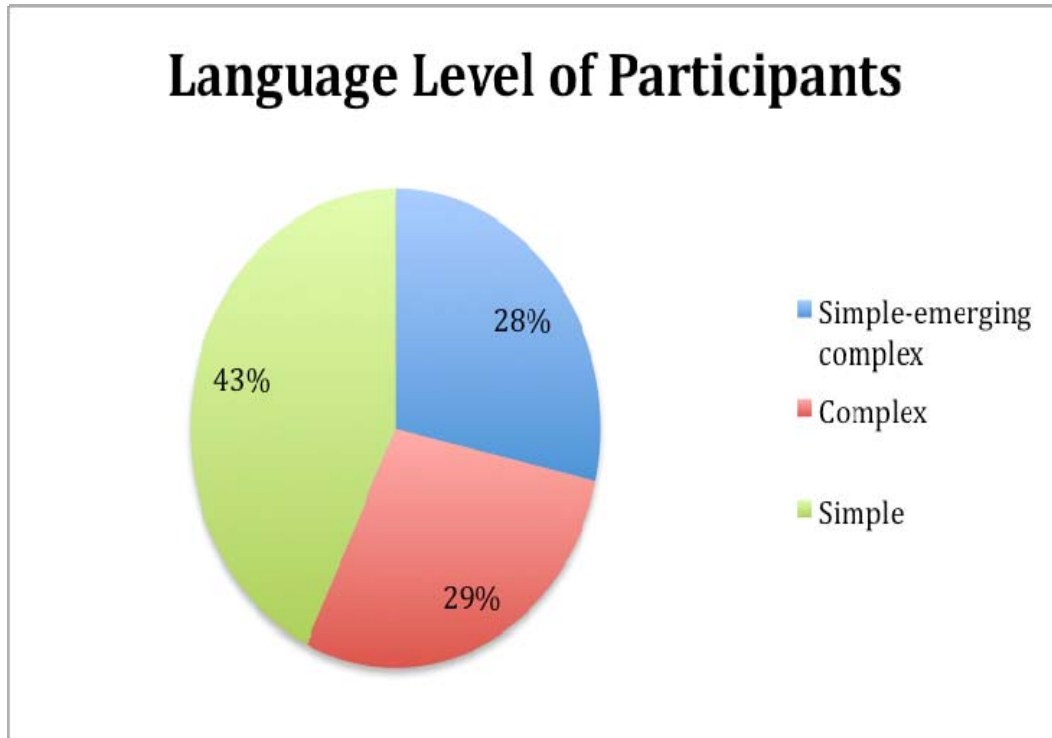
The examiner hypothesized that dialogue journals would promote literacy development by motivating the students to enjoy the writing process as well as give the

students a purpose for writing. Students who are deaf and hard of hearing require direct instruction on the syntactical elements of both spoken and written language. Therefore, the students who participated in this study were not expected to learn new grammatical structures that were not previously introduced through a structured lesson before the use of dialogue journals. The examiner hypothesized that through indirect instruction of calling attention to written language errors of syntax, the participants in this study would be able to correct syntactical errors modeled in the facilitator's journal entries. The examiner also hypothesized that dialogue journals would promote the practice of asking and answering questions on subjects the students may not be familiar with. Finally, the examiner believed that students would improve their ability to correctly spell words using the modeled entries.

Procedures

This study was conducted at Central Institute for the Deaf in St. Louis, Missouri, with seven students who are deaf and hard of hearing and have been enrolled in an educational program that teaches listening and spoken language. Each of these students' language levels is reported using the Teacher Assessment of Grammatical Structures (TAGS) (Moog and Kozak, 1983). The TAGS rating form describes a simple sentence structure as containing four or more words including one verb form, and a complex sentence structure as containing six or more words including two verb forms. Student A is seven years old with a bilateral mild to moderate sensorineural hearing loss. The child has access to sound with bilateral hearing aids and uses simple sentences and some complex sentence structures in spontaneous language as measured on the Teacher

Assessment of Grammatical Structures (TAGS). Student B is seven years old with a bilateral severe to profound sensorineural hearing loss. The student wears bilateral cochlear implants and uses language at the simple sentence level. Student C is seven years old with a bilateral severe to profound sensorineural hearing loss. The student wears one cochlear implant and one hearing aid and uses language at the simple sentence level. Student D is nine years old and has a bilateral severe to profound sensorineural hearing loss. The student wears bilateral cochlear implants and uses complex sentences in spontaneous language. Student E is ten years old with a bilateral severe to profound hearing loss sensorineural hearing loss. The student wears bilateral cochlear implants and uses complex sentences in spontaneous language. Student F is eleven years old with bilateral severe to profound sensorineural hearing loss. The student wears bilateral cochlear implants and uses mostly simple sentences and some complex sentences in spontaneous language. Student G is ten years old with bilateral severe to profound sensorineural hearing loss. The student wears one cochlear implant and uses simple sentences in spontaneous language. The seven students were divided up into two different classrooms for the time allotted for writing instruction. Classroom number one had students A-C and classroom number two had students D-G.



Simple Sentence: four or more words in a sentence containing one verb form.

Complex Sentence: six or more words in a sentence containing two or more verb forms.

Participants

| Participant | Journal | Age | Degree of Hearing Loss | Language Level |
|-------------|-------------|-----|------------------------|--------------------------|
| | | | | |
| A | Dark yellow | 7 | Mild to moderate | Simple, emerging complex |
| B | Dark green | 7 | Severe to profound | Simple |
| C | Purple | 7 | Moderate to severe | Simple |
| D | Light green | 9 | Severe to profound | Complex |
| E | Blue | 10 | Severe to profound | Complex |
| F | Red | 11 | Severe to profound | Simple, emerging complex |
| G | Yellow | 10 | Severe to profound | Simple |

Yellow: the participants in classroom number one.

Green: the participants in classroom number two.

The facilitator asked two teachers from Central Institute for the Deaf to implement dialogue journals with their students for ten weeks starting November 24, 2009. The goal was to have the students and the facilitator write two responses in the dialogue journal per week. Due to student absences, holidays and other time constraints, the average number of dialogue entries was one per week. Each student had his or her own journal. Each journal was color coded but did not contain any identifying information. The journals were kept in a homemade mailbox outside of the two classrooms. A note was used to identify when the students and the facilitator had “mail”, this was especially useful for the teachers to know when to implement the journals in their classroom.

The facilitator communicated the guidelines for implementing dialogue journals with the teachers through email. The teachers were instructed not to help the students in their writing. They were allowed to help the students read the facilitator’s responses. The teachers explained the purpose of the dialogue journals and the process of the facilitator’s study. The teachers did provide the students with the facilitator’s name, however the facilitator did not know the identities of the students. The teachers allotted a fifteen-minute time frame twice a week for the students to write in their journals. The essence of dialogue journals is not to correct any of the student’s writings. However the facilitator predicted that students who are deaf and hard of hearing would benefit from subtle, indirect instruction. Therefore the facilitator underlined written language errors that were modeled in her response to the child’s entry. The teachers explained this system of underlining to the students, instructing them to attend to the underlined portions of their entries when reading the facilitator’s response.

A few weeks into the study, the facilitator noticed that the students were making the same written language error multiple times after the facilitator modeled the correct use of the language. The facilitator determined that the students were not reading their own entries prior to reading the facilitator's response. After discussing this finding with the teachers, they addressed the issue with the students and suggested they reread their entry, read the facilitator's response, and then write their next entry.

The facilitator started each journal with the same prompt: "I want to get to know you better, tell me three of your favorite things to do on the weekend?" All of the facilitator's responses contained a few comments about the students' entry and at least one question. Comments that the examiner wrote were used to express interest in the topic, draw a relationship between any common likes and dislikes and to share something about the facilitator with the student. The facilitator used questions to start a new topic, expand on the students' response on a specific topic and to clarify a confusing entry. The number of entries that were written in reference to a specific topic was based on the natural progression of the conversation; the student's interest and knowledge of the topic had a direct effect on the number of entries written per topic.

RESULTS

Overall the students who participated in this study were reported to have enjoyed writing in their journals by their classroom teachers. Their classroom teachers reported that dialogue journals helped motivate their students to write. They reported that the students were very enthusiastic about sharing their ideas with the facilitator. Each group of students had a different experience using dialogue journals. The students in classroom number one found the task very challenging, while the students in classroom number two were more independent and enjoyed the activity. One possible explanation of this finding is that the students in classroom number one are significantly younger than the students in classroom two. Perhaps, the younger students have acquired fewer writing skills overall and have had fewer opportunities to engage in writing tasks. Both of the teachers commented that it was difficult to know how much help to give the students during this task. Three of the students had a difficult time gathering their thoughts and putting them to paper. Those students were reported to have sought help from the teacher for the majority of their writing. As reported by the classroom teachers, all of the students were very timid in the beginning, not wanting to take any risks or make mistakes. As the students gained practice independently writing in their journals, their confidence in their abilities increased. The increased confidence minimized their fear of making mistakes, allowing the students to take more risks when writing their journal entries as the weeks progressed.

As mentioned, the two different groups of students obtained very different benefits from using dialogue journals. Classroom number two had older students who had a better facility with literacy skills than the students in classroom number one who were

in the early stages of literacy development. Between the two classes there was a good mix of language levels. For the purpose of this study a higher language level did not correspond with being older in age. The majority of students who had more advanced literacy skills understood the process and purpose of dialogue journals. This ability allowed these students to increase the number and length of meaningful interactions between the facilitator and the students. The majority of students who were younger and had less-developed literacy skills demonstrated difficulty with the task of expressing their ideas on paper without help from their teacher. They demonstrated difficulty in reading the facilitator's responses and this affected their ability to clearly reply to the specific entry from the facilitator.

This study also revealed that dialogue journals were more effective in terms of correcting written language errors with students who had developed more complex language. This supports findings reported in the literature review, that students are not able to convey in written language what they cannot produce in their spoken language. Two of the three students who use language at the simple sentence level were unable to use some of the language structures that they possess in their spoken language in their written language. This was evidenced by their attention to the mechanics of writing (capitalization, punctuation, and spelling) as opposed to communicating a message effectively. The students who use more complex spoken language were able to communicate their thoughts on paper in a manner that conveyed a clear message to the reader. Three of the four students in classroom number two were able to easily correct any spelling or syntactical errors that were underlined in the teacher's response and use the correct forms in their following entries. An example of this occurred with student F.

The facilitator modeled the phrase, “when you turn thirteen...” “ The student then replied in the next entry, “ I will graociton when I turn thirteen.” The examiner found it helpful for the teachers implementing the dialogue journals to remind their students to reread their responses as well as to pay attention to what the facilitator had underlined in her entries before the students wrote their entry. On a few occasions these students were also able to correct spelling errors specifically that were not underlined in the teacher’s entries, in their own responses. Student D continuously wrote “want” for “what” until about halfway through the study. The student corrected the written error by accurately spelling “what” in the following entries even though the examiner had not underlined the error.

After about three entries from the facilitator, all of the students started to ask questions of the facilitator. The majority of the questions the students asked had been modeled for them in previous responses by the examiner. The majority of the students’ attempts at producing an interrogative sentence were not completely grammatically correct, but it was apparent that they were trying to use the specific interrogative sentence structure. Through contact with the students’ teachers the facilitator was able to confirm that the students had the ability to use interrogative sentences in their oral language within a prompted setting. After reading multiple models the students were able to start incorporating interrogative sentences in their written responses to the facilitator. One of the most popular interrogative sentences used in the dialogue journals from the facilitator was “ What did you do over the weekend?” All of the students started using this question in their own entries. Student E asked, “What do you do over this weekend?” Student A asked, “ What do you did weekend?” Both of these examples support the fact that the

student had not yet mastered this sentence type, but were encouraged to use the structure in their dialogue journals after exposure to multiple models from the examiner. This finding supports the hypothesis that dialogue journals can be used to reinforce language structures that are developing in the student's spoken language.

Overall three of the seven students who had acquired language at the simple sentence level, had difficulties transferring their thoughts onto paper in a clear manner. The majority of the entries written by this group of students were unreadable in terms of language. These three students were not able to write in a manner that conveyed their intentions. These students were not able to answer the questions being prompted by the facilitator and their entries rarely stayed on topic. Two of the students in this group were able to make spelling corrections and simple verb tense corrections after seeing the underlined model in the facilitator's entry. Overall these students were not as consistent in correcting their written language errors. However, one of the students did try to incorporate modeled sentence structures in his/her writing, and was able to approximate the modeled syntactical structure. An example of this came from student C talking about what he/she did over the weekend. The student's response was, "I get went to my grandmas house." In the previous entry from the facilitator, the sentence "I went to my friend's house over the weekend," was used as a model for the student. Although two of the three students mentioned were younger and in classroom number one, the other student was significantly older and in classroom number two. The student in classroom two was absent a considerable amount of time and therefore did not engage in the interactive journal process to the extent of the other students. The examiner believes that

this student's inconsistent attendance accounted for a small amount of data to analyze and less opportunity to observe growth in written language.

Overall dialogue journals encouraged the students to be motivated to write in their journals weekly. They also gave the students a purpose for writing. All of the students demonstrated improvement in one or more aspects of written language; including syntax, spelling, punctuation, capitalization and or intent. The majority of the students were able to correct spelling errors seventy-five percent of the time. Dialogue journals did not teach the students in this study any new language structures, but did encourage the development of emerging language structures in their writing.

CONCLUSION

The goals of this study were as follows: to determine if students who are deaf and hard of hearing in an educational setting that teaches listening and spoken language are able to correct written language errors through interactive journals; as well as to determine if these students are able to gain facility with language structures, interrogatives, and spelling through a less structured setting.

After analyzing the results of this study, the examiner came to the conclusion that dialogue journals can be an effective tool in encouraging the development of literacy skills within a balanced literacy program. Dialogue journals can be used as a daily or weekly classroom activity, which motivates the students to write independently, for a specific purpose. Interactive journals promote the development of literacy by allowing the students the opportunity to apply previously learned syntactical, grammatical and spelling skills in their writing.

This study displayed evidence that the use of dialogue journals was more effective with students who had acquired spoken language at a complex language level. The students who had acquired language at a simple sentence level had a positive experience even though they did not make a significant amount of progress correcting their language errors in their journals. The examiner suggests that interactive journals can be implemented with students of all ages and language levels, as long as objectives specific to dialogue journals are different for each group of children. In a classroom with children who have not acquired language at a complex level or efficient literacy skills, the objective of interactive journaling should be to demonstrate a purpose for writing as well as motivating the students to engage in writing activities. For students who have better

facility with language at a complex level as well as literacy skills, the goals of dialogue journals can focus more on improving syntactical, grammatical and spelling errors.

There were several limitations of this study including a small number of participants and a limited time frame in which to implement the study. This affected the frequency of entries between the participants and the facilitator. Due to the small sample size of data and participants, it was difficult to determine specific strengths and weaknesses of the use of dialogue journals. The facilitator found it difficult to know what language structures the students had facility with and what language structures were emerging. It would be beneficial to the person implementing dialogue journals to be the classroom teacher who knows what the students are working on through out the year. Another benefit to having the classroom teacher be the implementer is to determine how many emerging language structures in the student's spoken language are also developing in their written language.

The field of deaf education is at a turning point influenced by the recent advances in technology. Children who are deaf and hard of hearing who are learning to listen and use spoken language, have better access to speech sounds which provides the students the ability to learn phonemic awareness skills in a similar manner as students with typical hearing. This study has shown that students who are deaf and hard of hearing have the ability to engage in informal writing opportunities to encourage the development of their written language. The use of dialogue journals in a multi-faceted writing curriculum encourages the development of literacy skills, the development of spoken and written language, and motivates students to enjoy the writing process. A balanced literacy

program that includes dialogue journals appears to be an effective strategy to enhance the literacy skills of students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

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APPENDIX: LETTER TO PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

Julia and Lauren-

Thanks for participating in my independent study! I wanted to give you an overview of what I am trying to do and what my goals are for this year's project. A dialogue journal is a non-threatening way to correct written language errors, I will give the students a question to respond to twice a week if possible. The students will write their response to the question and I will respond to them making sure to correct any of their language errors in my response.

Ex: What did you bring for lunch yesterday?

CH:” I bringed a red lunch box and ham and cheese.

T: I brought a green lunch box and I had a ham and cheese sandwich too! Do you like mayonnaise or mustard on your ham and cheese sandwich?

The goal is to see if the students will pick up on the language corrections and start to use them in their writing over the year. The students will respond to the questions on their own, if they need help reading the question, you can help them read it. The responses should only take 5 minutes twice a week. Dialogue journals can also be used to assess their comprehension of other subject areas as well. If there is anything you want me to focus on or ask a specific question through out the year just let me know!

Sincerely,
Sara Morrell

Human Research Protection Office

Barnes-Jewish Hospital
St. Louis Children's Hospital
Washington University

November 24, 2009

SARA MORRELL
School Clinic Research Professional Education
Box 8042

HRPO Number: 09-1659
Title: Dialogue Journals: A Non-threatening Way to Improve Written Language Skill
Funding Source: Berkowitz Lynda, Ms.(Faculty Sponsor);
Exempt Status Verified: 11/24/2009
Type of Review: New (Behavioral Exempt 1)
HIPAA Compliance: Exempt

The Washington University Human Research Protection Office ("HRPO") complies with Federal regulations 45 CFR 46, 45 CFR 164, 21 CFR 50, and 21 CFR 56. Accordingly, the above-referenced project has met criteria for exemption as allowed in 45 CFR 46.101(b).

Because we have determined that the activities described in this application meet current criteria for research that is exempt from federal regulations governing human participants, your project is not subject to the requirement for continuing review or documentation of informed consent. No further action is required as long as research procedures described in this application remain the same.

You are, however, required to obtain IRB approval for any revisions or modifications to your original project description prior to implementation of those changes. You are also responsible for reporting any unanticipated events involving risk to research participants or others, and all other requirements as outlined in the WU HRPO Assurance of Commitment and Policies. Procedures (<https://hrpo.wustl.edu>) (click on "policies" tab). This includes reporting any unanticipated problems involving risk to research participants or others.

If you have questions or require additional information, please contact us at (314) 633-7400 or eIRB@msnotes.wustl.edu.

Sincerely,



Philip A. Ludbrook, M.D.
Executive Chair and Associate Dean
Berkowitz Lynda, Ms.



Mitch Sommers, Ph.D.
Chair, Behavioral Minimal Risk Subcom

Washington University in St. Louis Social-Behavioral-Educational
Exempt Determination Protocol
Human Research Protection Office (HRPO)

HRPO USE ONLY: HRPO# 091659

| |
|---|
| Principal Investigator/Project Director's (PI/PD) Name: Sara Morrell |
| Faculty Sponsor's Name (if applicable): Lynda Berkowitz M.S.S.H and Julia West M.S.S.H |
| Project Title: Dialogue Journals: A Non-Threatening Way to Improve Written Language Skills |

Contact HRPO by calling (314) 633-7479 if you have questions regarding completion of your Protocol.

1. Provide a brief background/history related to your project. **Be succinct.**

Research has shown that students who are deaf or hard of hearing tend to make errors in their written language. As a teacher there are many options in how to correct or improve written language, but most of them fall under a structured lesson; dialogue journals are a non-threatening way to improve written language by putting the responsibility of correction on the child. A more natural way to improve written language may or may not prove to be successful with children who are deaf or hard of hearing who sometimes need to be taught in a structured setting.

2. Describe your research objectives. This section may include research questions and hypotheses.

Through the use of dialogue journals, the students will be able to improve their written language skills through a natural setting. Dialogue journals will allow for the correction of language to be the child's responsibility and will improve the child's independent writing samples.

3. Describe the potential contribution of your project. Describe how this project will contribute to the literature and/or the field.

My project will help facilitate understanding of how deaf or hard of hearing children learn to write.

4. Estimated end date of project:

The estimated end date for this project will be May 2010.

5. Clearly define each participant group by providing age ranges and any other relevant descriptors (e.g., social service providers, social service recipients, students, employees in the work place)

Seven students from The Central Institute for the Deaf in St. Louis Mo. The children's ages range from seven to eleven years old and are all in the Upper Primary department at CID.

6. Describe the process you will use to recruit each participant group.

Recruitment is most voluntary when it enables potential participants to actively seek information about the study. Recruitment of friends or acquaintances should be avoided, when feasible, to reduce the possibility of coercion. As a general rule, employers should not introduce studies to their employees. If recruiting or conducting research at another location (e.g., church, school), it is wise to obtain prior permission from the site; however, HRPO does not require documentation of approval from that organization.

WU
HRPO
Approved 11-24-09

The student's teachers have implemented the use of dialogue journals in their regular curriculum guide for the year. The students will work in the dialogue journals twice a week for 5-10 minutes per session.

7. Provide a brief but thorough overview of all project procedures, including the estimated amount of time required of each participant.

For interviews or focus groups:

- ATTACH a complete list of questions and/or topics that will be covered in the interview.

For surveys or questionnaires:

- ATTACH the survey in your application *unless* it is a standard, published survey used for diagnostic or assessment purposes.

The students will write in their dialogue journals twice a week during their regularly allotted time for writing. The students will be given 5-10 minutes each time to write a response in their journals. The study facilitator will read their responses and respond in their journals and put them in a box outside the classroom for the students to pick up. This cycle will repeat until the estimated end date of May 2010.

8. Describe the exact amount or value of any remuneration. Specify under what conditions, if any, the remuneration will not be awarded. Enter N/A if no remuneration is provided to participants.

N/A

9. Describe how you will maintain the confidentiality of the data.

The student's journals are color coded a different color for each child. There is no identifiable information on the journals, the students know what color notebook they have and are in charge of writing in the correct journal.

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