

#1 WHAT IS DIALOGIC BOOK-SHARING IN THE CLASSROOM?

In 2020, Mikhulu Trust adapted its Dialogic Book-sharing for Pre-School Teachers (DBS-PS) programme for early childhood educators in Namibia. With support from the University of Namibia and the University of Reading, 13 teachers from 8 ECD centres in Windhoek participated in training. Despite disruptions due to COVID-19, all teachers were trained and assessed before and after the programme. Findings showed dramatic improvements in teachers' book-sharing skills, and marked improvements in children's language, attention, and book behaviour. The study supports a strong case for expanding DBS-PS in low-resource ECD settings.



UNDERSTANDING BOOK-SHARING

Book-sharing can be more than just reading aloud. Dialogic Book-Sharing (DBS) is an interactive way of engaging children with books. The DBS-PS programme helps teachers turn storytime into a shared, stimulating learning experience that supports children's language, attention, and social understanding.



WHAT MAKES BOOK-SHARING "DIALOGIC"?

- The teacher encourages participation by asking open-ended questions
- The teacher discusses characters' thoughts, feelings, intentions, and perspectives
- The teacher responds positively to children's contributions
- The teacher helps children summarise the story at the end of the session

After training, all teachers actively encouraged children to participate, and all but one teacher helped children summarise the story. Nearly all teachers responded positively to what the children said.

WHY IT WORKS:

- 1 The story is "unwritten" - especially with wordless picture books, which allow children to interpret and imagine.
- 2 This promotes child-led storytelling, critical thinking, and expressive language development.
- 3 The focus is on shared meaning, not just decoding text.

#2 THE TRAINING JOURNEY

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What was the context of the study?

The study was designed to evaluate whether ECD teachers could learn and apply dialogic book-sharing techniques — even in challenging, low-resource settings. Training was structured, adaptive, and teacher-focused, continuing even through pandemic disruptions.

THE TRAINING FORMAT

- Four two-hour sessions using slides and video demonstrations
- In-person delivery of Sessions 1 & 2 over a week
- Teachers practised in their own classrooms between sessions
- One-on-one mentorship visits: observation + personalised feedback
- COVID lockdowns forced the rest of the training to be delivered online, including mentorship and a revision session three months later

The training was extremely well-received by the teachers, all of whom improved their book-sharing skills dramatically.

Participants

13 

teachers partook in the study

8 

ECDs were involved

115 

children aged 3-4 years

ALL 

assessments took place in the centres, pre- and post-training

10 
WEEKS*
*AVERAGE

COVID meant exposure to book-sharing ranged from 3 to 18 weeks

#3 THE IMPACT – TEACHER SKILLS & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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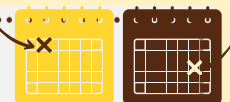
Despite the interruptions caused by COVID, both teachers and children showed significant gains. This infographic highlights the changes in teacher behaviour, child attention, language development, and book engagement.

Teachers' Book-sharing Skills



On all but one dimension (encouraging shy children), the ratings of teacher behaviour after training showed a marked increase in desirable behaviours.

After Training...



- 100% of teachers encouraged participation
- Nearly all teachers discussed characters' feelings and intentions
- Nearly all responded positively to children's ideas
- All but one helped summarise the story with the class

Child Attention*

At the start of the programme, between **50-70%** of children showed behaviours linked to attention difficulties, including restlessness, constant fidgeting, being easily distracted, acting without thinking, and having a poor attention span.

After the intervention, three of these behaviours (restlessness, fidgetiness, and poor attention span) dropped to **10%** or less. The remaining two behaviours were still present, but at much lower levels than before — showing a significant overall improvement in children's attention and self-regulation.

*Teacher Ratings - SDQ scale

Child Language*

"There was a marked increase in desired behaviour on all six items."



Most improved item:

- Understanding **wh-questions** (what, who, where, why)
- Improved language, especially **expressive language**

*Teacher Ratings - BESSI scale

In terms of book behaviour, the average looking time by children almost doubled after teacher training: 114 seconds → 206 seconds



#4 WHY THIS MATTERS - EVIDENCE & NEXT STEPS

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BOOK-SHARING TRAINING WORKS

This study not only shows real improvements for teachers and children, it also shows that high-quality training can succeed — **EVEN UNDER PRESSURE** — and that low-income ECD settings can implement meaningful pedagogic change.

WHY THIS STUDY MATTERS

- Teachers rated the training as extremely interesting, informative, and enjoyable.
- All reported fundamental changes in how they use books in class.
- All expressed a definite commitment to continuing book-sharing.

LIMITATIONS

(AND WHY MORE RESEARCH IS NEEDED)...

- The assessment was compromised by COVID. Only a third of the children were reassessed.
- Findings may also reflect natural maturation. Only a randomised controlled trial can determine the true magnitude of impact.

THE CHILDREN SHOWED...

1. Greater language & attention capacity
2. Higher engagement with books
3. Increased understanding of emotions and perspectives



HOWEVER...

Children aged 3 and 4 years had no meaningful differences at baseline, suggesting DBS was a key driver of gains.

NEXT STEPS

This study strongly supports the conduct of a large-scale randomised controlled trial of the DBS-PS programme in South Africa.



#5 HOW BOOK-SHARING CHANGED THE CLASSROOM

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The Challenge

In under-resourced ECD centres, storytime is often just reading at children... But what happens when we train teachers to book-share instead?



The Training...

13 ECD teachers in Windhoek joined a Book-Sharing programme.

They learned how to:

- Ask questions
- Encourage shy children
- Discuss characters' feelings
- Let children tell the story



Teacher Transformation

After training...

100% encouraged participation

Almost all of the teachers discussed characters' emotions

All but one of the teachers helped summarise the books

“It's changed the way I use books with my class.”



What Changed for the Children

The children's progress was clear:

- Language improved – especially “what/who/why” understanding
- Attention problems dropped from **70%** to under **10%**
- More children talked, listened, and loved book-sharing



Book Behaviour

When given a wordless picture book:

- Children looked nearly **twice** as long
- More children **understood** the book

“Aside from holding the book, every behaviour improved.”

Why it Matters

Despite COVID disruptions, the study showed that:

- Book-sharing works in **low-income** classrooms
- Teachers can drive **change**
- Children **THRIVE** when we shift how we share stories

What's Next?

We need to bring this to more teachers and centres

We're calling for a large-scale trial in South Africa.

Let's build stronger futures — one shared story at a time.



“Children now enjoy book-sharing and talk more. I will keep doing it!”

