Promoting high-quality interactions among early childhood education minority students: a case study of dialogic literary gatherings

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Abstract

Quality dialogue and interactions in the classroom are crucial for creating effective learning environments and reducing inequalities from an early age. Dialogic reading interventions are known to be beneficial in early childhood education, but there is still much to learn about creating the most conducive interactions in the classroom. This article focuses on dialogic literary gatherings (DLGs), a successful educational action that introduces classic literature to children. DLGs create a learning context where rich interactions emerge from an egalitarian dialogue, valuing all contributions regardless of the person's position in making inferences. The study analysed instructional, emotional and social interactions in DLGs in an early childhood classroom in a disadvantaged Spanish neighbourhood, using a communicative research methodology. Findings show that DLGs facilitate high-quality interactions between teachers and students and among students. The pre-school teacher used DLGs to stretch the learning and thinking of participating 4- and 5-year-old students, promoting self-regulation and prosocial behaviours. DLGs can play a vital role in creating a more equitable and stimulating learning environment in early childhood education.

Key words: dialogic literary gatherings, minority students, early childhood education, dialogic reading, classic literature, urban school

Introduction

This study sought to analyse instructional, emotional and social interactions in dialogic literary gatherings (DLGs) implemented in an urban early childhood classroom. DLGs introduce the reading of classic literature through dialogue with adult guidance. Previous research has demonstrated that this successful educational action generates learning environments in which high-quality instructional, emotional and social interactions emerge (García-Carrión et al., 2020; Khalfaoui-Larrañaga et al., 2021). These studies have focused mainly on DLG's impact on teaching and learning processes in primary and adult education. However, how DLGs generate high-quality interactions in early childhood education has been less explored. This study deepens the implications of this action in an early childhood education classroom in a low socio-economic status sample from a Spanish case study. In addition to facing socio-economic disadvantages, participating students are from ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Among them, 68% belong to cultural minority groups, with approximately 47% being of Moroccan descent, 13% identifying as Roma and 8% from Latin American countries. Furthermore, nearly half of the students do not have Spanish or Catalan as their mother tongue despite both languages are the official languages of the school. Specifically, a qualitative analysis is carried out on the interactions between the teacher and the students and among the peers based on the reading and debate on three adapted works of classic literature.

Literature review

Research has shown that dialogic contexts improve children's reading and learning as well as their relationships with peers, families and their environment (Khalfaoui-Larrañaga et al., 2021; Pillinger & Wood, 2014). Prior studies have emphasised the importance of dialogue and interactions in learning (Aubert et al., 2017; Flecha, 2015), with Freire and Macedo (1989) advocating for a dialogical approach to reading, which involves reading the word and the world and developing a critical perspective to

transform reality. Bakhtin (1986) also highlights the importance of chains of dialogues formed by prior communicative interactions of linguistic emissions, with shared interpretation promoting new meanings through collective interpretation. Considering these contributions, researchers with diverse approaches and methodologies have highlighted different aspects of interaction. Some examples include Collaborative Reasoning (Reznitskaya et al., 2009), Philosophy for Children (Lipman et al., 1980) and the Thinking Together approach (Mercer et al., 2019).

Research on literature instruction has identified specific patterns of classroom discourse that contribute to the emergence of discussions (Nystrand et al., 2003). These patterns, known as discourse moves, can be made by teachers or students and have been found to increase the likelihood of meaningful discussions taking place in classrooms. Examples of these discourse moves include authentic teacher questions, which do not have a predetermined answer, student-generated questions, and the incorporation of the previous speaker's words or ideas through a process called uptake.

Alexander (2020) also provides evidence of the positive impact of dialogic teaching on student engagement and learning. This teaching approach aims to enhance the quality of communication between teachers and learners to improve children's learning experiences. It implies teachers' training in strategies that empower students to participate in reasoning, discussions, arguments and explanations, rather than simply responding passively. These strategies foster higher order thinking skills and promote effective communication.

Dialogic reading interventions in early childhood education have shown a positive impact by facilitating vocabulary acquisition, narrative production skills and emergent literacy (Grolig et al., 2020). High-quality early childhood education practices involve teachers establishing warm and responsive interactions, engaging infants in instructional interactions and using effective language forms and communicative acts (Burchinal et al., 2023; Lonigan et al., 2013; Rasku-Puttonen et al., 2012; White et al., 2015). The benefits of dialogic teaching have also been studied concerning early childhood education. Thwaite (2023) has investigated teachers' principles and repertoires in dialogic discourse with young children in Western Australia. Furthermore, Jones and Siraj (2023) have demonstrated how approaches that emphasise the quality of the pedagogic talk, such as dialogic teaching and sustained shared thinking (SST), have contributed to successful literacy transitions in the English curriculum. In their research, SST refers to interactions in which individuals cooperate 'in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, or extend a narrative' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009, p. 79).

This article aims to investigate the interactions established during DLG implementation in early childhood education. DLG is a dialogic reading practice grounded in the conception of dialogic learning (Flecha, 2000), which has shown successful results in various learning and development dimensions (Aubert et al., 2017; Díez-Palomar et al., 2020). Dialogic learning has seven principles, including egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence and transformation of contexts. In the following section, the theoretical background related to DLGs is presented, which puts dialogic learning into practice through the reading and discussion of classic literature works (Díez-Palomar et al., 2020).

DLGs

With Flecha's (2000) dialogic learning as the basis, DLGs promote a dialogic context of learning in which rich interactions arise from an egalitarian dialogue, giving value to all contributions regardless of the person's position making the inference. These interactions emerge from the reading and discussing texts that have high cultural status (Díez-Palomar et al., 2020; Flecha, 2015), often referred to as classic literature. Understanding classical literature is not exclusive to the elite (Torras-Gómez et al., 2021); adults without basic education, children in primary and their families enjoy reading classic works (Ruiz-Eugenio et al., 2023). Participants are well aware of the intrinsic value of literary classics as tools to reflect on their experiences and imagine and work towards any possible future (Torras-Gómez et al., 2021). Lenhart et al. (2023) concluded using a longitudinal study that among diverse types of literature, the results of their research do confirm that reading modern classic literature predicts more prosocial behaviour and better social adjustment in the future, with no such beneficial effects observed for nonfiction and other types of literature. Furthermore, another research study showed how Shakespeare's grammatical exploration forces the listener to take a more active role in integrating the meaning of what is said, promoting significant activation beyond regions of the brain classically activated by typical language tasks (Keidel et al., 2013). Plenty of research offers evidence of the impact of DLGs (Ruiz-Eugenio et al., 2023) but little on the impact of the classics in early childhood education.

DLGs provoke children's active thinking, exchanging ideas and knowledge about concepts, words, meanings, diversity of contexts and feelings (Soler,

2015). They help them go beyond the mere repetition of disconnected or meaningless words or texts. In addition to working on comprehension, DLG participants develop connections between words and stories, knowledge and experiences, both personal and other members of the gathering. In this context, DLGs in early childhood education entail the implementation of an intervention recognised as a successful educational action aimed at introducing classic literature to very young children from diverse backgrounds.

DLGs have been widely analysed and shown to promote high-quality instructional, emotional and social interactions in adult and primary education (Fernández-Villardón et al., 2021; Soler, 2015). Previous research has also found that DLGs can promote prosocial behaviour, better integration of students with disabilities and social inclusion of vulnerable groups in primary education (Molina, 2015; Villardón-Gallego et al., 2018).

In the case of early childhood education, DLGs are increasingly being applied in new contexts (European Commission, 2019). Their implementation has been documented in countries such as the United Kingdom, Spain and Portugal and in different Latin American countries, including Brazil, Colombia and Mexico (European Union, 2019; General Directorate of Education, 2021; Rodríguez-Oramas et al., 2021). However, little research analyses DLGs in early childhood education in depth (Soler-Gallart & Flecha, 2018).

DLG is an educational action characterised by an environment of respect for diversity and egalitarian dialogue among all participants. DLGs encourage the participation of individuals from different origins, cultures and social positions as a positive strength since learning develops through exchanging personal experiences and points of view. Books from classic literature, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Arabian Nights* or *Ramayana*, are debated and discussed in DLGs. Even young children can participate in DLGs by reading with the help of parents or another adult, who can be a teacher or volunteer. During a DLG, after reading a text, all participants select a sentence or paragraph to comment on with other participants. The DLGs have a moderator, usually, a teacher, who ensures that dialogic interactions meet four conditions: consideration towards verbal and nonverbal aspects (e.g., listening and respect for others), consensus on respecting the opinion of all participants, the absence of coercion regarding interpretation or speech, and honesty and sincerity. To implement DLGs, teachers receive specific evidence-based training on dialogic learning and detailed training on preparing and conducting DLGs (García-Carrión et al., 2020).

Material and methods

This research aims to identify what kind of instructional, social and emotional interactions DLGs promote in the minority urban 4- and 5-year-old students. In the following pages, we present the central aspects of the methodological design raised by this qualitative research, focusing on the study context and participants and the data collection procedure and analysis.

The study context and participants

This case study examines how DLG interactions influence early childhood education students in an urban school located on the outskirts of a city near Barcelona, Spain. The school is situated in an isolated area separated from the city by a stream and a road. The neighbourhood was developed in the mid-1950s as part of a protected housing programme, and it became a reception area for non-European low-skilled workers, mostly from Morocco, Senegal and Latin American countries, due to the job demand in the city's construction sector in the early 2000s. The neighbourhood has around 40% non-European immigrant residents, and only 10% have post-compulsory education levels. Additionally, a large proportion of the residents have limited knowledge of the region's official languages, Spanish and Catalan (Municipality of Terrassa, 2019).

To address the school's low academic achievement, absenteeism and conflict, the school implemented the Schools as Learning Communities (SLCs) project (Flecha & Soler, 2013). SLCs are grounded in several successful educational actions to improve academic achievement and reduce conflict. Previous studies indicate that DLGs are one of the successful educational actions that have generated the most significant impact in improving the results obtained by the school (De Botton et al., 2014).

Our research involved students from two groups in the second cycle of early childhood education. The pre-school teacher had organised these groups before the study. Thus, the groups were not explicitly constituted for the research since they were part of the school organisation to carry out the DLGs. A total of 28 students were involved in the fieldwork (N = 11 from the second year [4–5 years old] and N = 17 from the third year [5–6 years old]). Most of the participating students (68%) belong to a cultural minority. Around 47% are Moroccan, 13% are Roma and 8% come from Latin American countries. About half of the participating students do not have Spanish or Catalan (official languages of the school) as their mother tongue.

Based on the criteria of significance, the sample has incorporated the pre-school teacher in charge of implementing the DLGs in early childhood education. She has been a Uruguayan teacher involved in the development of DLGs at the school since 2009. At the fieldwork time, she was retired but continues to implement this action as part of the school's extensive community involvement programme.

Data collection procedure

This study follows the communicative research methodology (CM) (Gómez et al., 2019). This methodology is guided by postulates such as eliminating the interpretative hierarchy, promoting equal epistemological levels and encouraging dialogic knowledge. In contrast to other participatory approaches, CM involves the active participation of researchers and the individuals being studied, who collaboratively co-create new knowledge on an equal footing. CM challenges the traditional distinction between researchers as mere 'subjects of study' and participants as mere 'objects of study'. Instead, it recognises that individuals possess valuable everyday knowledge and experiences that are not to be treated solely as 'data' or disregarded. Researchers are responsible for combining their scientific knowledge with the knowledge contributed by participants, fostering an egalitarian dialogue. Specifically, data collection techniques included communicative observations ($N = 5$) and a semi-structured interview ($N = 1$).

Communicative observations allowed us to identify organisational dynamics and strategies that promoted interactions within participation situations during the DLGs. They involved the video recording of five DLG sessions, which lasted approximately 30 min each. The selected DLGs focused on three books: *The Trojan Horse* (adaptation from the *Odyssey*), *David and Goliath* (adaptation from the *Bible*) and *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp* (adaptation from *The Arabian Nights*). The observations were carried out randomly throughout the 2018–2019 academic year. The frequency varied depending on the teacher's availability. Besides overseeing video recordings, researchers also took notes about relevant episodes of the DLGs in a field notebook during the observations. According to the CM (Gómez et al., 2019), the researchers engaged in a dialogue with the school's principal and the pre-school teacher, discussing their interpretations derived from the analysis of video recordings and field notebooks. Thus, new interpretations emerged from contrasting the researchers' analysis of the collected data with the insights shared by the school's principal and the pre-school teacher.

The interview aimed to capture the pre-school teacher's perceptions about the strategies implemented to promote quality interactions between the students. In this regard, the interview script has included questions focused on planning and developing the DLGs, for instance: 'Before starting the DLG, do you provide any orientation to the students? What kind of orientations do you provide?'; 'When a student loses attention during the DLG, do you do something to regain their attention?'; or 'When a student is not intervening in the DLG, what do you do to promote their participation?'. At some point, we asked the teacher to recreate how she acted in a real classroom to understand her answers entirely based on these questions. Furthermore, the interview script incorporated questions to identify her perception of the impact of the interactions that occur in the DLGs in three areas: instructional, emotional and social. The questions included in the script in this regard aimed for the teacher to provide examples of interactions and learning situations in the DLGs in which she identified improvements in these specific areas.

The study followed ethical criteria and was approved by the Community of Researchers on Excellence for All (CREA) Ethics Committee. We obtained written consent from the school's principal and the families to video-record the DLG sessions. Also, all personal information was anonymised by applying pseudonyms, coding and carefully safeguarding data privacy.

Data analysis

Data analysis aimed to identify what instructional, emotional and social interactions occur in the DLGs. We designed an analysis matrix following the communicative methodology (Gómez et al., 2019) (see Table 1). We established two categories of analysis extracted from the literature review: instructional interactions and emotional and social interactions. The literature review on DLG, which focuses mainly on primary education and adult education, allowed us to identify these two categories. We refined their definition by contrast with the scientific literature on early childhood education and debates among the research team.

We also established two dimensions: exclusionary and transformative. The exclusionary dimension refers to the barriers or limitations identified when promoting quality interactions during DLGs. In contrast, the transformative dimension relates to the elements and strategies that help overcome these situations.

We codified and transcribed the content of the video recordings, field notebooks and interviews.

Table 1: Data analysis matrix.

Category	Definition	Dimension and code	Definition
Instructional interactions	It covers interactions established with the aim of engaging infants deliberately in instructional exchanges. Includes quality in the teachers' feedback and other relevant aspects as her capacity to encourage children to communicate, develop reasoning skills, elicit their thoughts and ideas, or shape children's use of language and vocabulary (Alexander, 2020).	Exclusionary (1)	Factors present in the DLGs hindering the emergence of quality instructional interactions
		Transformative (2)	Factors present in the DLGs promoting the emergence of quality instructional interactions
Emotional and social interactions	It encompasses interactions that monitor children's behaviour and establish a good classroom climate (i.e., establishing clear rules and providing students cues for how to behave) (Rasku-Puttonen et al., 2012). It also includes interactions that create a safe environment where students feel invited to share their emotions and ideas (Burchinal et al., 2010). Behaviours related to promoting solidarity and rejection of violence have also been considered.	Exclusionary (3)	Factors present in the DLGs hindering the emergence of quality emotional and social interactions
		Transformative (4)	Factors present in the DLGs promoting the emergence of quality emotional and social interactions

Abbreviation: DLGs, dialogic literary gatherings.

Finally, the analysis was performed, which allowed us to group and interpret the data. The preliminary findings were discussed again with the pre-school teacher and the school's principal. This exchange allowed us to refine some of the findings and identify some limitations of our study.

Findings

The findings indicate that DLGs promote central classroom quality elements (Blewitt et al., 2018; Díez-Palomar et al., 2020). This section provides the main findings related to those elements that have enhanced quality interactions between the teacher and the students and among students during the DLGs. First, the implementation phases of the DLGs are systematised. Second, findings related to instructional interactions and emotional/prosocial interactions facilitated by the DLGs are provided.

DLG's implementation process

Through the analysis of communicative observations and the interview, four distinct phases have been identified in the implementation of the DLGs: (a) preparation of the DLGs, (b) pre-gathering, (c) development of the DLGs and (d) closure. We briefly summarise them as follows:

a Preparation of the DLGs: The teacher selects an adapted classic literature book, and each weekly session focuses on a small fragment or specific pages of the book. Supporting materials, such as puppets and flashcards, are used, and students are organised into heterogeneous small groups to facilitate familiarity and trust.

b Pre-gathering: In this phase, the teacher prepares students for the DLGs by reviewing norms (e.g., raise your hand, respect the turns to speak and nobody can make fun of a classmate's intervention), recalling the story's main elements and using cards to visualise characters and their characteristics, fostering a safe and contextualised environment.

c Development of the DLGs: It involves the application of the seven principles of dialogic learning (Flecha, 2000), which can be summarised as follows: (a) egalitarian dialogue: All contributions are valued regardless of the individuals presenting them, as long as reasoned arguments support them; (b) cultural intelligence: It goes beyond academic intellect and encompasses various aspects of human

interaction, including academic intelligence, practical intelligence and communicative intelligence; (c) transformation: Instead of adapting learning to the existing context and interactions, DLGs focus on transforming the context and interactions themselves to facilitate enhanced learning; (d) instrumental dimension: DLG aims to bridge the gap between instrumental and humanistic dimensions of knowledge, integrating the acquisition of knowledge and skills with the cultivation of humanistic aspects; (e) creation of meaning: DLGs foster the creation of meaning by respecting participants' identities and future aspirations, aligning education with their everyday experiences, cultural background and language while emphasising the social value of what they are learning; (f) solidarity: DLGs promote the establishment of spaces of solidarity, welcoming individuals from diverse backgrounds, and priority is given to those who have not yet participated or find engagement more challenging; and (g) equality of differences: Equality in DLGs means recognising and respecting the right of all participants to be and live differently while treating them with equal respect and dignity. Contemplating these principles, the teacher reads the book slowly, pointing at each syllable, and periodically opens up a dialogue with the students. After reading a page, the teacher asks a question and encourages students to express themselves freely, guiding the discussions and introducing new questions when necessary.

d Closure: The teacher invites students to share their highlights and what they learned. The teacher congratulates the participants and reminds them to leave the library calmly.

Instructional interactions

This section provides the findings concerning the instructional interactions generated during the DLG's observations. Specifically, we collected evidence on how the pre-school teacher used this action to stretch the learning and thinking of the participating 4- and 5-year-old students.

First, concerning the elements identified in the exclusionary dimension, two challenges have been identified that the teacher has addressed to promote good DLG functioning. Early childhood education students' ability to involve in a dialogic exchange is, in many cases, limited and challenging (Rasku-Puttonen et al., 2012) and therefore has required the teacher to play a prominent role in scaffolding interactions to guide the construction of knowledge. It implies that although the main aim of DLGs is to encourage students to freely express their ideas and build new ones based on the interventions of their classmates, the teacher provides guidance and support for this to happen. For instance, the teacher often highlights a phrase or a specific situation on the book's page and contributes with a question encouraging student intervention and interaction.

It is also important to highlight that DLGs have developed in Catalan (one of the school's and the region's official languages) and that this is not the student's mother tongue. Therefore, their skills to express themselves in Catalan were very diverse, ranging from students who had difficulties speaking fluently in Catalan to students who were highly competent in the use of the language.

Regarding the transformative dimension, we found DLG strategies that mitigate challenges and promote quality instructional interactions, including engaging in conversations, fostering shared thinking and introducing classic literature and culture from an early age.

For instance, the following dialogue extracted from a DLG based on the book *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp* illustrates how the teacher's dialogic interactions promoted in the DLGs favour the emergence of 'dialogue chains' (Bakhtin, 1986) that allow students to get involved in SST (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). In this case, students cooperate in an intellectual way to define one of the text's highlighted words: 'genie'. It shows how students collectively build knowledge, grounding their contributions on previous interventions made by their classmates. As evidenced, Child 5 defines the word genie, including previous definitions provided by her classmates (Child 1 'grants wishes', and Child 3 'is like a ghost'). Besides these previously highlighted qualities, Child 5 clarifies the complex term 'transparent', which had already been suggested by Child 4 ('it is white, but you cannot touch it'). We present the whole sequence of dialogues below:

Teacher: (reading aloud) the genie from the lamp appears (Asking the students) What is a genie?(Eight children raise their hands)(Teacher: looking at Child 1 and nodding)
Child 1: it is the one who gives us wishes(Teacher: nods her head and smiles. He looks at Child 2, who has raised his hand, and nods.)
Child 2: it is like Santa Claus(Teacher: keeps shaking her head and smiling. She points to Child 3 whose hand is raised.)
Child 3: He is like a ghost, but you can touch him because he is a genius. He is like a ghost, but he gives you wishes. He is like a ghost, but he is good. You can touch him, and he doesn't do anything to you.
Teacher: aha, so … what is the genie-like?
Child 4: the genie is not black, he is not red, he is white, but you cannot touch him.

Teacher: mmm … interesting … (points to Child 5 whose hand is raised).

Child 5: he is like white; he is like grey … he is … (thinks) … transparent! It is like glasses. And he is also a ghost that gives you wishes.

The teacher's feedback is crucial in contributing to the emergence of discussions and promoting instructional interactions during the DLGs. Our communicative observations have recorded a variety of prompts and moves used by the teacher. These moves include authentic teacher questions, which do not have a predetermined answer, and student-generated questions (Nystrand et al., 2003). Furthermore, the teacher also uses open-ended and Wh questions, distancing and recall questions, and completion prompts. Unlike conventional feedback that focuses solely on the correctness of students' responses, the teacher's prompts actively engage children in conversation, eliciting their expressions, thoughts and ideas. Additionally, teachers' feedback is often directed towards promoting higher order thinking skills. An example is seen in the following dialogue from a DLG session on *The Trojan Horse*. After reading the sentence 'Ulysses has an idea', the teacher asks the students, 'What does it mean to have an idea?' This question prompts the students to move beyond the book's content and initiate a conversation about their intellectual processes.

Teacher: (reads aloud) Ulysses has an idea.(Ask the students) What does it mean to have an idea?Six students raise their hands. She points to Child 1.

Child 1: an idea is when I raise my hand, and you say my name, and I talk about the idea I have.

Teacher: And when you talk, what have you had to do before?

Child 1: (pauses thoughtfully) I thought

Teacher: Great! So, having an idea is …

Child 2: to think!

Teacher: Aha! So, we have ideas when we think (nodding). For example, what ideas have you had? Think about it … because I would love to know any idea that each of you has had.(Points to Child 3, who has raised his hand)

Child 3: He [Ulysses]thought he could give the Princess the Trojan Horse, but maybe she did not want it …

Teacher: Yes, but I am also interested in what ideas you have had. Let's see, who has ever had an idea?(Four raise their hands. The teacher looks at Child 4)

Child 4: I had a good idea: one idea is that this afternoon I will buy a ball.

Teacher: Look what a fantastic idea Child 4 has had! This afternoon, she will buy a ball. And Child 5? What idea have you had? (Points to Child 5 whose hand is raised)

Child 5: We think because we have a brain in our heads.

The communicative observations have also allowed us to identify that basing the DLGs on classic literature books is perceived as enabling learning. The topics in these books (e.g., love, friendship, war or justice) have incentivised students to make meaning towards learning. We have also identified it in the interview with the teacher. In this regard, she remarks that, compared to other types of children's literature she uses in other contexts, the universal topics present in these texts help students go beyond reading and connect it with personal and social experiences. Moreover, as can be identified in the following quote from the teacher's interview, the work carried out on the classic works through the DLGs brings students from non-academic families into contact with highly valued culture and socially recognised literature they usually have no access. It also improves connections between school and home contexts, as they identify classic cultural references beyond the school and put them into dialogue with their families.

We talk about Troya's Horse, Aladdin's lamp, David, and Goliath … without the gatherings, these children would not have known these books. And sometimes relatives tell me they are amazed when children tell them about King Menelaus, about someone so wholly estranged from them. And that they (the children) treat King Menelaus or Princess Elena like family …. I see that the DLG also bring them an opening to the world. (Margarita, teacher)

Emotional and prosocial interactions

This section presents findings on emotional and prosocial interactions in the DLGs. It highlights how these interactions have promoted self-regulation and monitoring challenging behaviours, created a supportive and safe environment and encouraged prosocial behaviours such as solidarity and rejection of violence.

First, it is relevant to highlight some exclusionary aspects identified in the analysis. In the communicative observations, we detected factors that put at risk the correct development of DLGs (e.g., challenging behaviours and difficulties for some students to maintain attention during the session). The teacher has developed strategies to promote student self-regulation and monitor challenging behaviours to cope with these risks. For instance, she constantly provides them with cues about how they should behave during the DLGs. A prominent strategy in this regard has been the so-called pre-gathering phase. It contributes to creating a positive and participatory predisposition by the students, anticipating what will happen and ensuring that they know the gathering's rules. In addition to this group strategy, the teacher has implemented

individualised interventions for students with behavioural difficulties. For instance, she usually places these students in positions close to her. When she observes that they begin to lose attention, she generates positive interaction (e.g., she invites them to participate or assigns them a relevant task in the functioning of the DLGs). The strategies contributing to generating a complicity climate, especially with the students with more difficulties, have been identified in the communicative observations. They have also been put into dialogue with the teacher through the interview, as stated in the following quote:

> When you are with this child who is more active or is more distracted, I say: listen, if you want, you can be my secretary, and when a character appears, you can point to it and show it to your mates (showing the card). King Menelaus! He takes King Menelaus and shows the others. It is a way of integrating him into the pre-gathering, in the gathering, to make him interested, to make him participate … and after that, you have seen, he is hooked on the DLG and does it super well. (Margarita, teacher)

Second, the trustworthy climate generated in the DLGs has helped students express their feelings and emotions. Among the elements that have intervened to create this atmosphere, it is essential to mention the teacher's role in putting into practice the principles of dialogic learning that have contributed to creating this trustworthy climate (Flecha, 2000), such as guaranteeing an egalitarian dialogue, highlighting the value of students' cultural intelligence, promoting solidarity and recognising the equality of differences. Furthermore, the child-centred approach adopted by the teacher is also relevant. Thus, the teacher puts children's emotions at the centre of the dialogue. This child-centred approach is identified in the following fragment corresponding to a DLG session based on *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*. The situations experienced by the book's characters, the interactions provided by the teacher and the classmates, and the trustworthy climate created encourage the students to reflect on and express their feelings.

Teacher: (reads aloud following with her finger) Aladdin marries the Princess.
All the students repeat: Aladdin marries the Princess
Teacher: (looking at the students) What does it mean to marry?(Five students raise their hands. She points to Child 1.)
Child 1: It is when a boy is very handsome, and a girl meets him and wants to go live together with him
Child 2: It means that he is in love with her … or that she is in love with him

Child 3: That is it! It means that she goes to live together with him, that she is in love with him.
Teacher: (nods her head) And what happens when we fall in love?(Six students raise their hands. She points to Child 4.)
Child 4: That someone loves us … my father loves me
Child 3: Mine loves me too! And I love my father and my mother
Child 5: I love my family
Teacher: (she addresses a distracted student who begins to play with the chair). Juan, and you? Whom do you love?
Child 6: Me? (He is thoughtful for a few moments) I love my father, mother, sister, and grandmother (he returns to focus on the gathering).(The teacher points to Child 7, who has her hand raised)
Child 7: When somebody loves me … I feel very happy!

Finally, another aspect identified with the emergence of prosocial behaviours has been constructing a safe context where values such as solidarity and rejection of violence have prevailed. The sense of security installed through the relationships enhanced in the DLG has contributed to the students expressing their feelings and generating opportunities to demonstrate empathy and care towards others. The teacher has reinforced these behaviours, providing consistent positions with her interventions. She has offered specific cues such as 'no one can laugh at a classmate. If he makes a mistake, we help him' or 'what we say in the gathering, cannot leave the library'. Furthermore, during the sessions, we have identified that their actions have always been consistent with this type of speech, intervening against disrespectful attitudes on the students' part and involving students in deep reflections on violence. The following fragment is an example of these types of interactions. It collects the dialogue generated from the gathering based on the book *David and Goliath*. With the statement, 'The giant makes fun of the shepherd', the students engage in a conversation about what it means to make fun of someone else. The trust climate generated in this session allows one of the participants to dare to speak about the bullying situations he suffers. Also, the dialogues generated open opportunities for students to reflect on the bystanders' responsibility and focus on students who openly position themselves against this type of violent behaviour.

Teacher: (reads aloud, following with her finger) The giant makes fun of the shepherd.What does it mean to tease somebody?(Five students raise their hands)
Child 1: (makes a mocking gesture with his hands)
Teacher: yes, that is teasing.(Points to another student whose hand is raised)
Child 2: Goliath says many things to David, who is very small, many ugly things.
Teacher: Is that okay with you?

Child 2: No, because I do not like anybody who makes fun of me.
Teacher: And when they make fun of you, how do you feel?
Child 2: Bad (thoughtful)
Teacher: And when it happens, what do you want to do? Cry?
Child 2: Run
Teacher: Run?
Child 2: Run, so I do not hear them (he covers his ears)
Teacher: You want to run, so you do not hear them (with a sad voice). (Points to a boy whose hand is raised)
Child 3: That is attacking a person who has done nothing to you.
Teacher: Exactly, that is attacking a person. Because … would you like them to do it to you?
Child 3: No, because that is coward, and the brave do not make fun of anyone nor their friends
Teacher: You have said that it is not brave … and are you brave or coward?
Child 3: Brave
Teacher: And why are you brave?
Child 3: Because I help people
Teacher: Whom do you help?
Child 3: Chamna, Hamsa, and Adam when a child was going to hit them and I said, but what are you doing? I said it in Spanish.
Teacher: in Spanish, in Catalan, or whatever language, but the important thing is that you said that they could not do that.

Discussion and conclusions

This article has analysed the instructional, emotional and social interactions DLGs promote in urban 4- and 5-year-old students. Specifically, we have explored how this successful educational action has generated a context of high-quality dialogue and interactions for minority urban students. Thus, the article has contributed to expanding the knowledge generated by previous research on the benefits provided by DLGs about enhancing critical understanding, providing emotional benefits and improving relationships between participants in very diverse educational contexts (e.g., primary education, teacher training, and adult education or social programmes with children at risk) (García-Carrión et al., 2020). Based on these previous findings, this study has also addressed a little-explored perspective: the implications of this action in early childhood education (Soler-Gallart & Flecha, 2018).

This work provides theoretical and practical implications for improving dialogic reading interventions in urban schools (Grolig et al., 2020; Lever & Sénéchal, 2011). More specifically, it provides evidence of the successful implementation of DLGs in early

childhood education in a highly diverse Spanish and marginalised urban school.

First, this research has illustrated how DLGs can help mitigate some of the challenges of early childhood education classrooms, such as students' limited ability to be significantly involved in dialogic reading exchanges (Rasku-Puttonen et al., 2012). The case study shows how the pre-school teacher has used the DLGs as an opportunity to promote quality instructional interactions aimed at stretching the learning and thinking of all participating students. The evidence indicates how, during the DLGs, the teacher has provided prompts and moves to engage students in meaningful conversations (Nystrand et al., 2003) and has fostered SST (Jones & Siraj, 2023; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).

These examples confirm that evidence-based actions such as DLGs put into practice the potentialities of dialogic reading and teaching from an early age. In this way, students learn to read while developing their interpretations of the text and 'reading of the world' (Freire & Macedo, 1989). Moreover, through the DLGs, students are involved in reading as a collective action in which their contributions are fundamental to creating new meanings based on chains of dialogues (Bakhtin, 1986). The teacher's feedback has played an essential role in this regard, not just focusing on the 'correctness' of the students' responses but actively engaging children in eliciting their expressions, thoughts and ideas.

Concerning promoting quality instructional interactions, our findings highlight the importance of classic literature as the basis of the DLGs, breaking with some elitist conceptions that consider this type of work unsuitable for learners who face more significant difficulties (Torras-Gómez et al., 2021). The evidence presented here illustrates that not only does socio-economic status fail to hinder these students' ability to comprehend and derive enjoyment from such literature, but in alignment with Flecha (2000), age also proves to be no obstacle. In turn, the topics present in these books (e.g., love, friendship, war or justice) have involved students in deep reflections and dialogues on universal issues. It has allowed students from non-academic families to contact highly valued culture and socially recognised literature, which has incentivised students to make meaning towards learning.

Throughout this research, we have also addressed relevant insights concerning how DLGs can contribute to the socio-behavioural development of early childhood education students (Burchinal et al., 2023). We have identified specific strategies contributing to students' self-regulation and monitoring of challenging behaviours. It has included the pre-gathering phase (the teacher ensures that all students know the rules before starting the session) or providing cues about

how they should behave during the DLG development. The supportive and safe environment climate generated in the DLGs has also contributed to students expressing their feelings and emotions. Among the elements that have intervened to create this atmosphere, the teacher's attitude stands out (supportive and sweet but also directive about compliance with the agreed rules). Furthermore, the child-centred approach (oriented to putting students' emotions at the centre of the dialogue) has also been identified as one of the elements contributing to generating this positive climate.

This article also provides valuable knowledge contributing to previous studies that have addressed the promotion of prosocial behaviours. Specifically, the study identifies how DLGs have promoted prosocial behaviours such as solidarity and rejection of violence. The situations provided by the texts and shared in the DLGs have promoted relevant dialogues around violence. The consistent positioning of the teacher reinforced these interactions throughout the sessions. The sense of security installed through the relationships enhanced in the DLGs has also generated opportunities for students to demonstrate empathy and care towards others. It aligns with previous studies showing how DLGs promote a positive classroom climate and prosocial behaviours such as friendship, empathy and solidarity in different contexts (Villardón-Gallego et al., 2018). However, no previous studies have focused on how DLGs promote these behaviours and feelings in early childhood education. Thus, this study suggests that DLGs could be an appropriate tool for identifying bullying or aggressive behaviours from an early age.

Finally, paying attention to some of the limitations present in this study is relevant. It is worth mentioning that this article provides findings related to a case study analysis. Therefore, further research on different contexts will make it possible to delve into the depth and breadth of the impact of the identified benefits. This article also opens the door to future longitudinal studies that make it possible to identify the degree to which DLGs can make a difference in the student's academic and social trajectories.

Our study contributes relevant evidence on the kind of high-quality interactions that DLGs promote in an early childhood education classroom in an urban school in a vulnerable context in Spain. Notably, it has identified instructional, emotional and prosocial interactions strengthened at an early age through reading some of the best literary creations of humankind on the ground of dialogic learning. The findings contribute to a body of research that, for decades, has been promoting and studying the social impact of DLGs, providing all communities and individuals, regardless of age, socio-economic status or ethnicity, with a quality education that opens up possibilities for advancing towards their desired futures.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

Data are available on request due to privacy/ethical restrictions.

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