Children with expressive language disorders are delayed in developing the use of words, sentences, gestures, and writing to convey meaning and messages to others (Rosenfeld et al., 2016). Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) see these clients in either an individual or group setting to increase children’s abilities to convey meaning through language.

Individual therapy is defined as a process through which clients work one-on-one with a trained therapist to achieve the individual’s goals(s) (The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, 2009). Group therapy is defined as therapy in the presence of a skilled therapist in which several patients work toward common therapeutic goals (Castillo & De Vera, 2011).

It is unclear if individual therapy or group therapy will result in better language production for children with expressive language disorders.

### Case Scenario

Deanna is a graduate student clinician in speech-language pathology. She is seeing clients with expressive language disorders in her university clinic. She is working with these clients in an individual therapy setting for language intervention.

Deanna approached the parents of the children she sees in the clinic for expressive language disorders. She asked them how they would feel about having their children participate in individual therapy or group therapy. Several parents stated that they would prefer individual therapy to allow their children on-one interaction with the therapist to achieve language goals. Other parents stated that they would prefer group therapy to allow their children group interaction and support from other students that are working toward the same language goals.

Deanna would like to be able to give these parents information regarding the effect of both of these treatments. She is wondering if individual therapy is more or less effective than group therapy when measuring improvement in expressive language skills for young children with expressive language disorders.

### PICO Question

Using the PICO (Patient, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) framework (Gillam & Gillam, 2008), the following question was developed:

**Do children with expressive language disorders (P) who receive group therapy (I) improve their expressive language production (O), as measured by norm-referenced tests, more or less than children who receive individual language therapy (C)?**

### Discussion

**Evidence external to clinical practice:** I would feel comfortable providing either individual or group language therapy to my clients to improve their overall expressive language production. My supervisor believes that using group therapy would be beneficial for my clients.

**Evidence internal to my clinical practice:** The parents of my clients believe that their children can benefit from group therapy. These parents want their children to attend group therapy to increase their expressive language abilities.

### EBP Decision

Because individual and group therapy have been proven not to be statistically different, my supervisor and I decided to implement both individual and group therapy. We will honor each parent’s request for individual or group therapy. Clients will be re-evaluated after 3 months of group language therapy. Based on external evidence, family preference, and clinical expertise, if a child needs more extensive language therapy, a different therapy can then be utilized.

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**Individual vs group language therapy for children with an expressive language disorder**

Deanna Damele, B.A. and Abbie Olszewski, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

University of Nevada, Reno

### Methodology

**Search terms:** language therapy, group therapy, individual therapy, expressive language, expressive language disorder, and expressive language intervention

**Appraisals:** Studies were appraised using a revised 8-point CATE form (Dollaghan, 2007). Compelling (7-8 points), Suggestive (4-6 points), Equivocal (0-3 points)

**Inter-rater reliability:** Inter-rater reliability of at least 85% was achieved.

**Database:** Google Scholar, Pub Med, Cochrane Collaboration, ASHA, and National Guideline Clearinghouse

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### Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors, Research Design and Appraisal Points</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boyle, M., McCarney, O’Hare &amp; Forbes (2009)</td>
<td>N = 161</td>
<td>To investigate the effectiveness of therapy intervention delivered individually or in groups for children with primary language impairment</td>
<td>Expressive and receptive language (combined measured with: CELF-3 UK)</td>
<td>C ELF-3 UK - No statistically significant differences between G1 and G2 on expressive and receptive scores for all participants (p &lt; 0.189).</td>
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<tr>
<td>G2: Group therapy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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### References


Elman, E., & Gillam, B. (2000). Teaching graduate students to make evidence-based intervention decisions: Application of a series of steps in a process with an authentic learning context. **Topics in Language Disorders.** 203:223-228


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**C C E D L (Communicative Abilities in Daily Living)**

**C C D L - Significantly different between G1 and G2 scores for all participants (p < 0.01).**

**W A B - AQ (Western Aphasia Battery-Aphasia Quotient)**

**W A B - Significant differences between G1 and G2 scores for all participants (p < 0.01).**

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**Search terms:** language therapy, group therapy, individual therapy, expressive language, expressive language disorder, and expressive language intervention

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