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Personal Narratives Across Diverse Cultures

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Working with the Grain: Appreciating Rich Narrative Traditions from Diverse Cultures

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Working with the Grain: Appreciating Rich Narrative Traditions from Diverse Cultures

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American Board of
Child Language &
Language Disorders

Sanding against the grain

Can you ruin the wood if you sand against the grain?



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Sanding with the grain

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CONTINUED




Learning Outcomes

After this course, participants will be able to:

- Explain the importance of parents in facilitating narrative improvement.
- Describe an evidence-based method for working with parents to improve children's narration.
- Identify values of diverse cultures related to narration.




Introduction

- Assessment of problem with personal narration:
- Does not require purchase of a \$200+ test
- Can be done informally: McCabe, A., & Rollins, P.R. (1994). Assessment of preschool narrative skills: Prerequisite for literacy. *American Journal of Speech-Language- Pathology: A Journal of Clinical Practice*, 3(1), 45-56.
- Tell a story to get a story. Determine whether child is typically developing by comparison to info in that article
- Ask parents how they feel their children narrate

Q7

Introduction

- The developmental sequence in McCabe & Rollins has also been found for low-income Chilean children,¹ low-income Californian children from Spanish-speaking Mexican heritage backgrounds,² Chinese,³ and Taiwanese children from varied SES backgrounds.⁴

¹Barra & McCabe, 2013; ²Guerra, 2008; ³Zhang, 2013; ⁴Lai, 2013

Q7 

Introduction

- Conversational elicitation
 - Not a test situation, relaxed
 - Tell a story to get a story
 - Neutral prompts (uh-huh, “tell me more” or repetition of child’s words) for assessment
 - Specific prompts for who, what, where, when, how, & why for improving narrative (what is missing?)

Why Personal Narrative?

- End of PreK predicts 1st grade comprehension, vocab, global language, narrative1
- End of PreK predicts 4th, 7th, & 10th grade reading comprehension & receptive vocabulary 2
- Helps children make sense of their experiences
- Enables children to connect with family and friends and make new friends

Q1 ■

Why Personal Narrative?

- Used in all cultures studied to date
- Exchanged daily between parents and children
- Most common type of narrative from children
- Helps children to make sense of their experiences
- Enables children to connect with family and friends and make new friends

Q1 ■

Why Personal Narrative?

- Reports to medical personnel are often narratives (how child got injured, e.g.)
- Reports to legal personnel, courtroom testimony involves narratives

Q1 

Parents Need to Be Involved

- Prior to an intervention Carole Peterson and I developed, we had researchers spend 20 minutes a day one-on-one with preschool children at risk of language delay 5 times/every two weeks for 8 months—an amount of time not clinically feasible
 - Asking direct wh- questions plus modelling good narratives
 - Asking children direct wh- questions without modelling
 - Modelling good narratives, no questions
 - Neither modelling nor questioning
 - Reading and dramatizing narratives

Parents Need to Be Involved

- Results? No impact of any of those conditions
- Instead, we did an intervention involving parents

Parents Need to Be Involved

- Explain the importance of narrative—they often do not know
- Model Elaborative Reminiscing
- Follow up with parents regularly
 - Remind parents of importance of narrative
 - Suggest prompts
 - Discuss places and times
 - Find out and address what, if any, issues they are having

Parents Need to Be Involved

1. Modeling elaborative reminiscing

Read Excerpt A

Read Excerpt B

Q4 ■

Instructions to Parents

1. Talk to your child frequently and consistently about past experiences
2. Spend a lot of time talking about each topic
3. Ask plenty of “wh” questions (who, what, when, where, how, why) and fewer “yes/no” questions (e.g., “Was Grandpa wearing a red coat?”) As part of this, ask questions about the context or setting of the events, especially where and when they took place

Q4 ■

Instructions to Parents

4. Listen carefully to what your child is saying, and encourage elaboration.
5. Encourage your child to say more than one sentence at a time by using backchannel responses (e.g., “I see” or “really?”) or simply repeating what your child has just said.
6. Follow your child’s lead. That is, talk about what your child wants to talk about, even if those experiences are negative. Actually, especially of those experiences are negative.

Q10

Instructions to Parents

- Do not focus on correcting children about facts or grammar or pronunciation. Listen to what they have to say.
- Keep your conversations interesting and, if appropriate, fun.

Q6

Improving Narrative Takes Time

- 2 years in our intervention with 27-month-old children at risk
- Explain this to parents. Assure them that several independent research labs have found that the method we use—training in elaborative reminiscing—works
- That it does take time takes us back to the importance of involving parents in this effort in the first place

Q3 

Improving Narrative Skills at Home: Results

- Children in Intervention group
 - Gained sig. in receptive vocabulary (PPVT)
 - Produced sig. more narratives
 - Produced sig. longer narratives
 - Produced sig. more temporal context
 - Produced sig. more total context-setting information
 - Produced sig. more unique units of information
 - Parents reported “feeling closer” to their children

Problem-solve with Parents

- Where do you think you would regularly be able to talk about the past with your child? Dining room table? Kitchen during food preparation? Waiting for bus, doctor, etc.?
- When do you think your family would regularly enjoy talking about the past? After school? At lunch or dinner?

Q9 ■

What Culture is My Client from?

- Do not assume by looking at skin color or name that you know what cultural values a parent has
- Instead, have a brief, respectful conversation with parent(s) about how they see their families and what they value in personal narratives
- I will talk about some cultural traditions about which we have done research, but there are many cultures yet to be studied

Q8 ■

Result: Cultural Differences in Narrative Structure

- European American values
- Japanese and Japanese American values
- African American values
- Latinx American values
- Haitian American values
- Chinese and Chinese American values

Values about Narration

- Family values about narration should take precedence over such things as goals, a feature of European and European North American school culture but not something valued by all cultures in this country.
- Remember that parents will feel comfortable if they talk in ways that they value rather than in ways prescribed by others. The more comfortable they feel, the more they will engage in reminiscing, and the better the outcome for their children.




European North American: 6-yr boy

- Hi, Sally, I broke my arm. Abstract
- I was, well, um, well, um, um, the day, two days ago, I was climbing the the tree. Orientation, setting
- and I... Well see, I went towards the LOW branch and I and I, I got caught with my baving suit? I dangled my hands down and they got bent. Actions
- because it was like this hard surface under it. Then they bent like in two triangles. But luckily it was my left arm that broke... High Point: Evaluation
- Only my mom [was home]. My mom was in the shower, so I SCREAMED for Jessica, and Jessica goed, told my mom. I DON'T have Dr. Vincent [anymore]. I had to go to the hospital and get...Mmmm. It was much more worsor than you think because I had to get, go into the operation room and I had to get my, and I had to take um anesthesia and I had to fall, fall, fall asleep, and they bended my arm back. And I have my cast on. Resolution
- Do you want to sign my cast? Coda

Q5



European North American Values

- Variations due to dialect and geography abound, as is true of all groups
- Generally value medium-length narratives
- Generally talk about one experience at a time
- Value goals and resolutions
- Value truthfulness

Q5

Japanese Values: 8-yr-old boy

- As for the first shot,
- (I) got (it) at Ehime.
- (It) hurt a lot

- As for the second shot,
- (I) knew (it) would hurt.
- (It) didn't hurt so much.

- The next one didn't hurt so much either.
- As for the last shot, you know.
- (It) didn't hurt at all.

Q5 ■

Japanese Values

- Brief turns
- Succinct narratives
- Talking about 2-3 similar experiences in same narrative
- Don't want children to insult listeners, who are expected to listen empathically
- Don't want children to embarrass themselves; "A talkative man is embarrassing" is a favorite proverb
- Minami & McCabe, 1995

Q5 ■




African American Values

- We went to the dentist before and I was gettin' my tooth pulled. And the doc, the dentist said, "Oh, it's not gonna hurt." And he was lying to me. It hurt. It hurted so bad I coulda gone on screamin' even though I think some...I don't know what it was like. I was, in my mouth like, I was like, "Oh that hurt!" He said no, it wouldn't hurt. 'Cause last time I went to the doctor, I had got this spray. This doctor, he sprayed some spray in my mouth and my tooth appeared in his hand. He put me to sleep, and then, and then I woke up. He used some pliers to take it out, and I didn't know. So I had told my, I asked my sister how did, how did the man take (it out). And so she said, "He used some pliers." I said, "Nah, he used that spray." She said, "Nope he used that spray to put you to sleep, and he used the pliers to take it out." I was, like, "Huh, that's amazin'!" I swear to God I was so amazed that, hum...It was so amazing, right? that I had to look for myself, and then I asked him too. And he said, "Yes, we, I used some pliers to take out your tooth, and I put you to sleep, and so you wouldn't know, and that's how I did it." And I was like, "Oooooo."

Q5



African American Values

- And then I seen my sister get her tooth pulled. I was like, "Oooooo" 'cause he had to put her to sleep to, hmm, to take out her tooth. It was the same day she got her tooth pulled, and I was scared. I was like, "EEEEhhmmm." I had a whole bunch cotton in my mouth, chompin' on it 'cause I had to hold it to, hmm, stop my bleeding. I, one day I was in school. I took out my own tooth. I put some hot water in it the night, the, the night before I went to school. And I was taking a test. And then it came out right when I was takin', when I finished the test. And my teacher asked me, was it bleeding? I said, "No It's not bleeding 'cause I put some hot water on it." And so my cousin, he wanted to take out his tooth, and he didn't know what to do, so I told him, "I'm a Pullin' Teeth Expert. Pull out your own tooth, but if you need somebody to do it, call me, and I'll be over." (8-year-old girl)

Q5




African American Values

- Having a boring life is no excuse for telling a boring personal narrative. Embellishments are welcome.
- Often talk about more than one experience in the same narrative—several tooth-pulling experiences, for example. Certainly establishes the narrator as a “Pulling Teeth Expert”
- Narratives may be performed, along with gestures

Q5



Latinx Values

- Yes, to grandma (to visit in hospital). My mother wanted to take her to the hospital, but grandma didn't wanted to go, but we took her. They didn't do anything to her. And another old lady was there. We looked at her but she was not grandma. The old lady was just talking and talking with my mom and with my sister Areli. Big sister who lives in Riverside (...) And we took her home. But she wanted to go to another house, which was my aunt's house, but that house was very ugly, and my aunt had too many dogs and the house was dirty. And then we took her to... to my aunt's (...) and now grandma says that my sister and my aunt keep the house clean and that it has a new roof. And today we are going to visit her. After school. (Mexican American girl, 7 years

Q5






Latinx Values

- Mention of many relatives (Cristofaro & Tamis-Lamonda, 2008)
- Reflect parents' focus on conversation rather than beginning, middle, end → may strike Anglo listeners as tangential (Meltzi, 2000)
- Bilingual children need to have their parents' speak to them in native language
 - Better quality of input
 - More talk
 - Closer relationships

Q5





Haitian American Values

A 7-year-old Haitian American girl (told in English)

1. And once when I was in this wedding,	
2. I was a flower girl.	
3. And my friend Isadora too was a flower girl.	rep, par
4. And I was wearing this dress.	
5. Can I show the dress?	rep
6. It was a long dress with a ribbon around it.	rep, det
7. It was a blue dress.	rep, par, det.
8. It was a long dress.	rep, par, det

Q5





Haitian American Values

9. And they stuck something on it.	det
10. I think it's still there.	
11. And it was a pretty dress.	rep, par, det
12. And I was sooo lucky	
13. Because there was a flower girl with curly hair	
14. —the same thing as me—	
15. at this other wedding.	
16. This flower girl—they wore ugly dresses.	
17. They was green.	det
18. And my friend said it was ugly dress.	rep, det

Q5





Haitian American Values

19. Their hair was ugly.	rep, det
20. This girl had, her hair was like this, like that (demonstrates).	Det, gesture
21. And it was up	det
22. And curled up	rep, par, det
23. And curled.	rep, par, det
24. I I was like ewww!	
25. I was glad I wasn't that flower girl!	
26. Because, and her hair was like, did she wake up in the morning?	

Q5





Haitian American Values

27. And these other flower girls-- their hair was different from my hair.	rep, par
28. Cause theirs was curly too,	rep, det
29. But it was different.	rep, par, det
30. It was skinny curly.	rep, par, det
31. But I don't like the dress	
32. And I don't like their hairs,	rep, par
33. But I like, but they had this same flower girl from at the wedding.	
34. It wasn't different.	rep, par, det
35. And the reception: Ghetto superstar.	

Q5





Haitian American Values

36. And I like "Ghetto Superstar"	rep
37. It goes (singing), "Ghetto superstar, that is what you are."	rep, singing
38. Yeah, Mya sings it.	det
39. Maya and Pras from the Fugees.	det
40. Can I show you the dress now?	

Q5




Haitian American Values

- Lots of emphasis on descriptive detail
- Lots of repetition
- Lots of parallel structures, poetic
- Not much emphasis on plot
- Not much emphasis on goals

Q5 ■




Chinese & Chinese American Val.

- Translated from the Chinese; a 6-year-old girl from Taiwan
- I was frightened (by a cockroach) before too but I forget. Once when I already was having a bath, My older saw, My older (sister) saw I, saw a caterpillar on me. When I took a bath last time. Then washed, then touched a a. When my older sister saw the caterpillar on me, I did not know, I did not know what that was. My older sister say, then she was frightened. Then my mom took a piece of toilet paper. Then she caught the caterpillar, threw (it) away. Then there were a bunch of ants in my house. I was frightened one time. I was frightened...there were a bunch of, a bunch of, super many ants in my house. Then (she) took a that..a tape. A tape. Then (she) took a tape when (she) took a tape to stick, then (my) mom took my tapes. To stick (the ants) and then took another tape again. Older sister did not help at all because she was drawing.

Q5 ■



Chinese & Chinese American Val.

- Value placed on succinctness over elaboration
- Less value placed on getting children to evaluate their experiences
- Often include several experiences in one narrative
- Often end without resolution
- Often include idioms reflecting moral values (e.g., Be kind and love each other)

Q5 ■

Chinese & Chinese American Val.

- 5-year-old boy, translated from Chinese
- Sometimes we hit each other.
- Then we hit each other as we quarreled. We were mad. Then we were angry. Then we hit each other; kicked each other. Then kicked each other; hit each other. Later the teacher saw. Then didn't allow us to hit. Then we stopped.
- Then the two of us played in love (an idiom).

Q5 ■

Conclusions

- Personal narrative is important for many critical reasons.
- To improve a child who struggles with personal narrative takes a great deal of time and input from parents. SLPs cannot do this on their own even under ideal conditions. Parents have the time needed.
- Encourage parents to talk about past experiences a lot and at length in the way that they feel comfortable talking about past experiences.

Conclusion: Implications

- Cultural differences in narrative may not always be understood as such and thus affect cross-cultural communication.
 - Beware misdiagnosing difference for deficit
 - But also beware of failing to detect deficits in clients/students from cultural groups not your own; ask someone who knows culture (e.g., parents)

Conclusion: Implications

- An added benefit: Now that you are familiar with a number of different cultural traditions of narrative, you not only can assist clients better. You will also be able to appreciate personal and fictional narratives from other cultures better.

Chameleon Readers

- If readers in the 21st century are to promote dialogue and mutual understanding between civilizations, they must be chameleon readers.
- They must be able to comprehend texts written and told by persons from the diverse cultures throughout the world.

McCabe, A. (1996). Chameleon readers: Teaching children to appreciate all kinds of good stories. McGraw-Hill.





- Thank you!



Improving narrative skills: More Info.

- McCabe, A. (In Press). A comprehensive approach to building oral language in preschool: Prerequisites for literacy. In D. Barone & M. Mallette (Eds.), Best practices in early literacy. New York: Guilford.
- Grove, Nicola. Open Story Teller program for individuals with intellectual disabilities, some nonverbal