

Critical Review:
Is small group narrative intervention effective in increasing narrative forms in preschool children with language impairment?

Jessie Heikamp

M.Cl.Sc (SLP) Candidate

University of Western Ontario: School of Communication Sciences and Disorders

This critical review examines the evidence regarding the effect of group narrative macrostructure intervention on increasing narrative forms in preschool children with or at-risk of language impairment. Study designs include: systematic review, quasi-experimental study, descriptive multiple baseline, and single group pre-post- tests. Overall, the literature reviewed indicates that explicit narrative macrostructure group intervention may be beneficial in supporting the development of expressive narrative forms in preschool children. Recommendations for future research and clinical implications are provided.

Oral narratives refer to “story telling, as a method of verbally recapitulating past experiences in order to describe, explain, and interpret events” (Crais & Lorch, 1994). Narratives are an important part of language and encompass a broad range of language abilities that have been shown to impact a child both within an academic and a social setting. Throughout child development, demands for narrative ability increase, whereby children are increasingly required to discuss events that are temporally and contextually removed.

The emergence of true narratives typically occurs between the ages of approximately 5- and 6- years of age (Appleby, 1978). However, children with language impairment may fail to keep pace with these developmental expectations, potentially causing difficulty with participation in mainstream settings (Davis, Shanks, & Davies, 2004). Research indicates that narrative abilities facilitate the development of literacy and are predictive of later academic performance, including both language and literacy. Further, it has been noted that oral narratives in language-impaired children differ from typically developing children. Of note, such distinctions of narratives include: fewer total words and fewer words; fewer story grammar components; fewer complete episodes; fewer protagonist attempts, plans, and internal responses; fewer story openings and closings; improper amounts of information; fewer successful repairs; fewer accommodations to uninformed listeners; and more incomplete cohesive ties than narratives by children with average oral language skills

The primary objective of this paper will be to critically review the existing literature regarding the effectiveness of explicit oral narrative with macrostructure intervention programs in focused classrooms or small

with a full description of the procedures for the group intervention. This information allows for intervention duplication to occur in the future. Overall results are suggestive of positive outcomes for preschoolers after narrative-based group macrostructure intervention; but results must be interpreted with caution because study limitations constrain the ability to draw causal inferences of the macrostructure intervention itself. Taken as a whole, the study indicates that preschool children with language impairment benefit from narrative intervention that, in this case involved explicit teaching of macrostructure elements. Teaching story grammar may have contributed positively to their improved narrative and discourse abilities (Hayward & Schneider, 2000).

Davies, Shanks, and Davies (2004) conducted a simple pre-post test comparison design to explore the effect of a group story grammar collaborative teaching intervention targeting the spoken language of 31 kindergarten children (mean age 5;7) identified by teachers as having language difficulty. Intervention occurred over the course of three, 40-minute narrative interventions sessions per week over eight weeks. In this study, the trained SLP worked along side the classroom teacher or support staff to plan and adapt tasks for children. Each week, the SLP provided a cooperative intervention focusing on macrostructure that was well described in the paper. Each element was represented visually (cue cards) numerous times in a variety of contexts. Each participant's oral narratives were assessed pre- and post- intervention using suitable standardized measures, evaluating the amou

Before drawing final conclusions from the research reviewed in this paper, it is necessary to consider several common methodological limitations that occurred across the studies. One limiting factor is the use of small sample sizes in many of the studies. The

of treatment should be assessed, along with the degree to which narrative intervention is beneficial in enhancing children's writing, reading comprehension, and other academic skills. In order to supp