

*The Berry Goan was away for a few months
 He went on a few months away
 He ate berries too
 And he ate peanut butter
 And fruit
 He's a person who likes everything
 He even eats light bulbs and things like that
 Even the pictures and things*

-Addie, 4 years



Session 1

Understanding Narrative Development

Learning Objectives

- ◇ **Define** the terms narrative, personal narrative, fictional narrative, and event cast.
- ◇ **Demonstrate** awareness of three major types of narratives.
- ◇ **Analyze** young children's narratives for the features of delivery, vocabulary, cohesion, and creativity.
- ◇ **Reflect** on why narrative skills in young children are an important aspect of language development.
- ◇ **Describe** the narratives of children with language difficulties.

Overview

Narratives are a very important area of language development for young children. **A narrative is one's account of an experience or event that unfolds over time.**

A narrative can be short:

I found my shoes. I put them on.

Or a narrative can be long:

I found my shoes. They are new, just got 'em. Grandma got 'em for me actually. I got 'em on and then I got on the bus. After that I got to school and was almost late.

A narrative can describe a real event, as in the examples above, or it can tell about a made-up or fictional event:

Once upon a time, a fairy princess found a pea under her bed. She didn't know how the pea got there, but she found it and she ate it. She then fell asleep and the prince came. The end.

Children begin to produce narratives very early in life, although the narratives of 1- and 2-year-olds are very short! For instance, a 2-year-old might say:

“Mommy, Daddy, Tasha shoe on”

to share his personal observation that everyone in his family is wearing shoes. The 3-year-old child’s narrative is somewhat more sophisticated:

“I put my shoes on, then we went outside and I got wet.”

The four-year-old’s narrative is even more impressive, perhaps including clear cause-and-effect relationships between events:

“I cleaned my room and got some money. My momma took me to the store and I got some new shoes. I paid for part of them myself because I made my own money.”

Narratives come in three types:

- The **personal narrative** is one’s account of a personal, real experience.
- The **fictional narrative** is one’s account of a made-up, make-believe experience or event.
- The **event cast** is one’s account of what is happening right now (like a sports broadcast).

Narratives are a **critical** language skill because children use narratives to:

- Follow directions from their teachers.
- Tell others about their experiences.
- Explain how they are feeling about something.
- Share with friends something they learned.
- Engage in creative play with others.
- Comprehend stories and books.

Narratives are **interesting** because they provide a window into the minds of children. They also tell us a great deal about a child’s ability to express himself or herself through language.

To produce a narrative, a child must:

- Use good pitch, loudness, and pauses.
- Select the right words to use to convey information accurately and precisely.
- Organize words and phrases into sentences and link these sentences together in a logical order.
- Be creative so as to produce something interesting.

Supporting narrative growth in young children is **important** because narrative is part of a child’s overall language system. Language skills help children to share their needs and interests with others; to communicate effectively; to learn from others; and to learn how to read and write. Strong language skills in the years of early childhood serve as a foundation upon which all later academic achievements will build. Strong language skills lead to academic and lifelong success.

Terms and Background Knowledge

Vocabulary

Narrative – A narrative is one’s account of an experience or event that unfolds over time. There are three major types of narrative: the personal narrative, the fictional narrative, and the event cast.

Personal narrative – A personal narrative is one type of narrative; it is one’s account of a personal, real experience or event.

Fictional narrative – A fictional narrative is one type of narrative; it is one’s account of a made-up, make-believe experience or event.

Event cast – An event cast is one type of narrative; it is one’s account of what is happening right now – like a sports broadcast.

Setting – Setting is the part of a narrative that provides information about where and when events take place.

Characters – Characters are the “actors” in a narrative; these may have proper names (Fluffy) or common names (the cat) and they may be persons or things.

Activity 1. Thinking About Narratives

As you begin to think about narrative development in young children, think about a narrative you recently heard from a child you know or teach. Respond to the following:


What was the child’s narrative about?

Activity 1. Thinking About Narratives – The Stories of Young Children

What prompted the child to produce a narrative? Was it spontaneous or did it occur in response to something, like a question?

How long was the child's narrative?

How well could you follow along with the child's narrative?



Activity 2. Learning Objectives

Review the learning objectives for the target domain of Narrative addressed in *Read It Again–PreK!* These include:

- To identify and describe setting and characters.
- To identify and describe major actions or events.
- To order three or more major events.
- To produce a fictional story including setting and characters.
- To produce a fictional or personal story with a clear beginning, middle and end.
- To share feelings, ideas or experiences of a story that are precise and understandable .

Of these six objectives, which ones do you feel you address often in your classroom?

Which ones do you feel you address rarely or not at all?

Activity 2. Learning Objectives – Reviewing Narrative

What's New?

This lesson addresses two new topics related to narrative development:

- ◇ What Makes a Good Story?
- ◇ Children with Narrative Difficulties.

Topic 1. What Makes a Good Story?

We want you to think about the characteristics of a good narrative so that you can support the narrative development of children in your classroom. Not all of the narratives we hear children produce are “good,” so to speak. Sometimes when a child produce a narrative, we cannot follow or understand it. This might be because the child spoke too fast or didn’t give us enough information. Telling a good story – whether it’s a personal experience or a fictional event – is hard! To produce a narrative, a child must exhibit four important qualities:

1. **Use good pitch, loudness, rate, and pauses:**
 - Does the child vary rhythm?
 - Is the child not too loud but not too soft?
 - Does the child use pauses at the right time, so that the narrative is not too fast and not too slow?
2. **Select the right words to convey information accurately and precisely:**
 - Does the child make good word choices to be precise and clear?
 - Does the child use specific nouns to refer to items rather than general words (e.g., “the boy” instead of “he”)?
 - Does the child use specific verbs to refer to events or actions rather than general words (e.g., “flew” instead of “go”)?
3. **Organize words and phrases into sentences and link these sentences together:**
 - Does the child organize words into phrases rather than simply using single words to convey items (e.g., “the little dog” instead of “dog”)?
 - Does the child string together many sentences to share a complete story?
 - Does the child link sentences together using conjunctions like “and,” “but” and “so”?
 - Does the story exhibit cohesion, in that it flows along and can be understood as a unit?

Topic 1. What Makes a Good Story?

4. Be creative so as to produce something interesting:

- Does the child include interesting details, such as information about setting and characters when telling fictional stories?
- Does the child provide information about feelings and emotions when sharing personal events?

We can refer to these more simply as **delivery**, **vocabulary**, **cohesion**, and **creativity**. Let's listen to some narratives and think about these qualities of children's stories.

Listen and Learn

It's time to watch the companion DVD. Turn on your DVD player and insert the DVD. Select **Session 1, Activity 3** from the RIA DVD menu. You will hear a child produce a narrative. Rate the child's narrative skills using the table below. After you rate the child's narrative, you will have an opportunity to compare your ratings to ours.

Activity 3. Assessing Qualities of Children's Narratives

Listen to this four-year-old's narrative and rate it using the following scale.

Quality		Low 1	Mid 2	High 3
<i>Delivery</i>	Use good pitch, loudness, rate, and pauses			
<i>Vocabulary</i>	Select the right words to convey information accurately and precisely			
<i>Cohesion</i>	Organize words and phrases into sentences and link these sentences together			
<i>Creativity</i>	Be creative so as to produce something interesting			

Now, listen to what we have to say:

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 1, Activity 3 Discussion** from the RIA DVD menu.

How do your ratings compare to our assessment?

Did you rate the child higher or lower on any items?

Listen and Learn

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 1, Activity 4** from the RIA DVD menu. You will hear a child produce a narrative. Rate the child's narrative skills using the table below. After you rate the child's narrative you will have an opportunity to compare your ratings to ours.



Activity 4. Assessing Qualities of Children's Narratives

Listen to this four-year-old's narrative and rate it using the following scale.

Quality		Low 1	Mid 2	High 3
<i>Delivery</i>	Use good pitch, loudness, rate, and pauses			
<i>Vocabulary</i>	Select the right words to convey information accurately and precisely			
<i>Cohesion</i>	Organize words and phrases into sentences and link these sentences together			
<i>Creativity</i>	Be creative so as to produce something interesting			

Now, listen to what we have to say:

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 1, Activity 4 Discussion** from the RIA DVD menu.

How do your ratings compare to ours?

In what ways were these two children's narratives similar in quality and in what ways were they different?

similar:

different:

What's New?

Topic 2. Narrative Difficulties

Some children have difficulties developing strong narrative skills. This may be due to a general problem with language development, termed language impairment. A child who has a language impairment may produce narratives that are:

- Shorter than other children's.
- Not very well-organized and difficult to follow.
- Imprecise in vocabulary and limited in word variety.
- Sparse on information or content.

Why is this a concern? It's a concern for two reasons. First, narratives are the way in which children share information with others. The child uses narratives to tell others how he or she is feeling and to share recent experiences or ideas. Therefore, a child with narrative difficulties will struggle to communicate well with others.

Second, narrative skills provide a foundation on which later reading and language skills will build. Children with strong narrative skills in early childhood have better reading skills than children with narrative difficulties. Narrative difficulties in early childhood can serve as a sign of risk for later reading challenges, particularly in the area of reading comprehension. For these two reasons, we want to provide as much support as possible to any children in our classrooms who show signs of narrative difficulties.

Topic 2. Narrative Difficulties



Activity 5. Narrative Difficulties

Consider the following narrative. In what ways could this child's narrative skills be improved?

"Him is sleeping.
Him is running.
And him got this thing.
Him is getting ants.
And him looks in this hole.
And he touched this thing.
And him went."

Think about:

The **length** of the narrative: Is it sufficiently long?

The **organization** of the narrative: Is it easy to follow? Are the ideas logically organized?

The **vocabulary** of the narrative: Are the words precise and well chosen? Is there a lot of word variety?

The **content** of the narrative: Does it provide a lot of good information?

Activity 5. Narrative Difficulties

Reflect and Apply

Reflect

1. Think about a child in your classroom. Write that child's name here: _____.

How many times during the week do you hear this child produce narratives?

Is this sufficient? What could you do to provide additional opportunities for this child to practice his or her narrative skills?

2. Look at the six narrative objectives addressed in *Read It Again–PreK!*

- To identify and describe setting and characters.
- To identify and describe major actions or events.
- To order three or more major events.
- To produce a fictional story including setting and characters.
- To produce a fictional or personal story with a clear beginning, middle and end.
- To share feelings, ideas or experiences of a story that are precise and understandable.

Which of these objectives do you give the most attention to in your classroom? Why?

Which of these objectives do you give the least attention to? Why?

What could you do this week to provide additional opportunities for the children in your classroom to practice these narrative skills?

3. What else do you want to know about narrative development in young children?

What resources or materials would help you develop this knowledge?

Apply

1. Sometimes it can be difficult to elicit a good narrative from a child. Try the following techniques to elicit a narrative from several children in your classroom.
 - Tell a story to get a story: Tell a story about yourself and then ask the child if he or she has ever experienced something similar.
 - Ask the child about a time when he or she got hurt and had to go to the doctor: Children like to share experiences about their boo-boos!
 - Use a wordless picture book: Find a book that contains pictures but no words, such as *Frog, Where are you?* by Mercer Mayer. Ask the child to look at the pictures and make up a story to go along with them.

2. Examine the narratives of two children in your classroom who you believe are very different in their language skills, in that one has well-developed skills and the other has under-developed skills.

- Collect a narrative from each child.
- Use the same approach to elicit both narratives (e.g., Tell a story to get a story) and write down or tape-record each child's narrative.
- Compare the quality of these two narratives taking into account the four aspects of narrative discussed in this lesson (delivery, vocabulary, cohesion and creativity).

How do the children compare?

Resources

Hughes, D., McGillivray, L., & Schmidek, M. (1997). *Guide to narrative language*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Mayer, Mercer. (1969). *Frog, Where are you?* New York, NY: Penguin Books USA, Inc.

Ukrainetz, T., Justice, L. M., Kaderavek, J., Eisenberg, S., & Gillam, R. (2005). *Artful storytelling: The development of expressive elaboration in fictional narratives*. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 48, 1363-1377.

