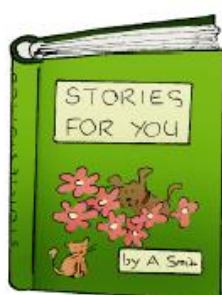


Supporting Narrative Training Workshop Information Handout



Narrative language skills

By 'narrative' we mean the way in which we 'map our thoughts' into language, either verbally or on paper, in order to convey information relating to an event. This information may relate to events in the past, present or future.



A pupil's ability to recount an event, orally or in written form, is dependent on having a 'message' to convey, the vocabulary and grammar to encode the message and a framework within which to organise, and sequence, that message.

In a sense narrative is the 'glue' that links the separate elements of language together and facilitates a pupil's ability to use language for the purposes of reasoning and explanation.

Whilst some pupils may not appear to have obvious difficulties with the separate elements of language, such as vocabulary and sentence structure, they may still experience difficulties in using language to express more complex ideas.

It is now well recognised that narrative development is important for school success, communicative effectiveness and social interaction.

Initially, children develop oral narrative skills but it is essential that they are then able to transfer these skills to written work.

It is a complex process that requires:

- Remembering what happened.
- Getting events in the right order.
- Picking out and repeating key information.
- Using the correct words.
- Using grammar.





Why are narrative skills so important?

Children are expected to use narrative skills every day. It's not just telling a story ... it's being able to talk about what happened during the day, explain an incident that happened in the playground, describe a day out etc.

As children get older, they are also expected to order their work, make arguments, hypothesise, use paragraphs to organise information etc.

Narrative skills have a huge impact on literacy development, and children with poor narrative skills may have difficulty in decoding and understanding text, using complex grammar and conveying ideas effectively.



How do I recognise a child with poor narrative skills?

A child with poor narrative language skills will frequently exhibit the following features:

- Using short sentences with limited detail.
- Being able to talk about the 'here and now' but not extend their narratives to past events.
- The events in their narrative accounts are jumbled.
- There are frequent mistakes and contradictions in their accounts of events.
- They use a lot of 'empty' words and phrases such as 'that thing'; 'do that'
- They have difficulties setting the context at the start of their narrative account. This can make it confusing for the listener.
- They may jump from topic to topic and, thus, lose the thread of their narrative account.



What can spoken difficulties look like for a young person?

You may notice.....

- They find it difficult to answer questions asked about a story
- Their story re-tells/re-telling of events may lack detail and have no context
- They miss the point of the story they are re-telling (what it's about)
- They always talk about the same thing/tells the same story
- They are able to talk about the 'here and now' but not extend their narratives to talking about past events
- They may start a story at the end/ the events are jumbled
- They may experience difficulty or frustration when sharing experiences and when they are unable to explain themselves.
- They may have difficulty making friends and maintaining friendships
- They use a lot of 'empty' generic words and phrases such as 'that thing', 'do', 'that' etc.
- Their sentences are shorter
- Some grammar is missing e.g. connectives such as, 'and'.
- Struggle to grasp key parts of written or oral stories:- such as main idea, character development, and implied meaning
- To answer questions about a text, they must repeatedly go back and re-read the text.
- Poorly developed reading comprehension skills
- Their ability to decode and encode (use phonic knowledge) can be greater than their reading comprehension
- Reduced participation in discussions and conversations
- Finds it difficult to express their own opinion
- Can struggle to work as part of a team and use negotiation and problem- solving skills
- May appear to have the social understanding, interaction and communication skills of a younger child
- May struggle to explain their actions/behaviour

Overview of Narrative Development

From Birth to 8 years old

Narrative skills develop in a predictable way and the development of narrative continues to about 8 years old

Ages and stages of Narrative development

Early communicators (birth - 18 months)

enjoy listening to simple stories

benefit from listening to oral stories, and shared book reading

will show interest in pictures in books, as well as props/costume used to tell stories

Early language users (12 - 36 months)



18 months -2 years

will start to tell a description of unrelated ideas/events/frequent changes of topic



2-3 years

will start to tell stories with a central character, topic or setting

Language and emergent literacy learners 3-4 years:

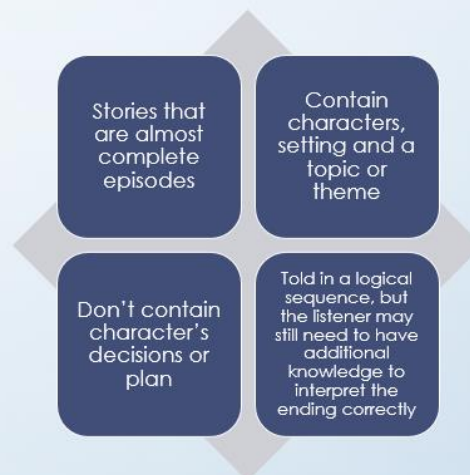
Primitive narratives

Stories contain characters, setting and a topic, with events following a central theme.

Cause and effect relationships emerge



Focused Chains - 4 -5 years

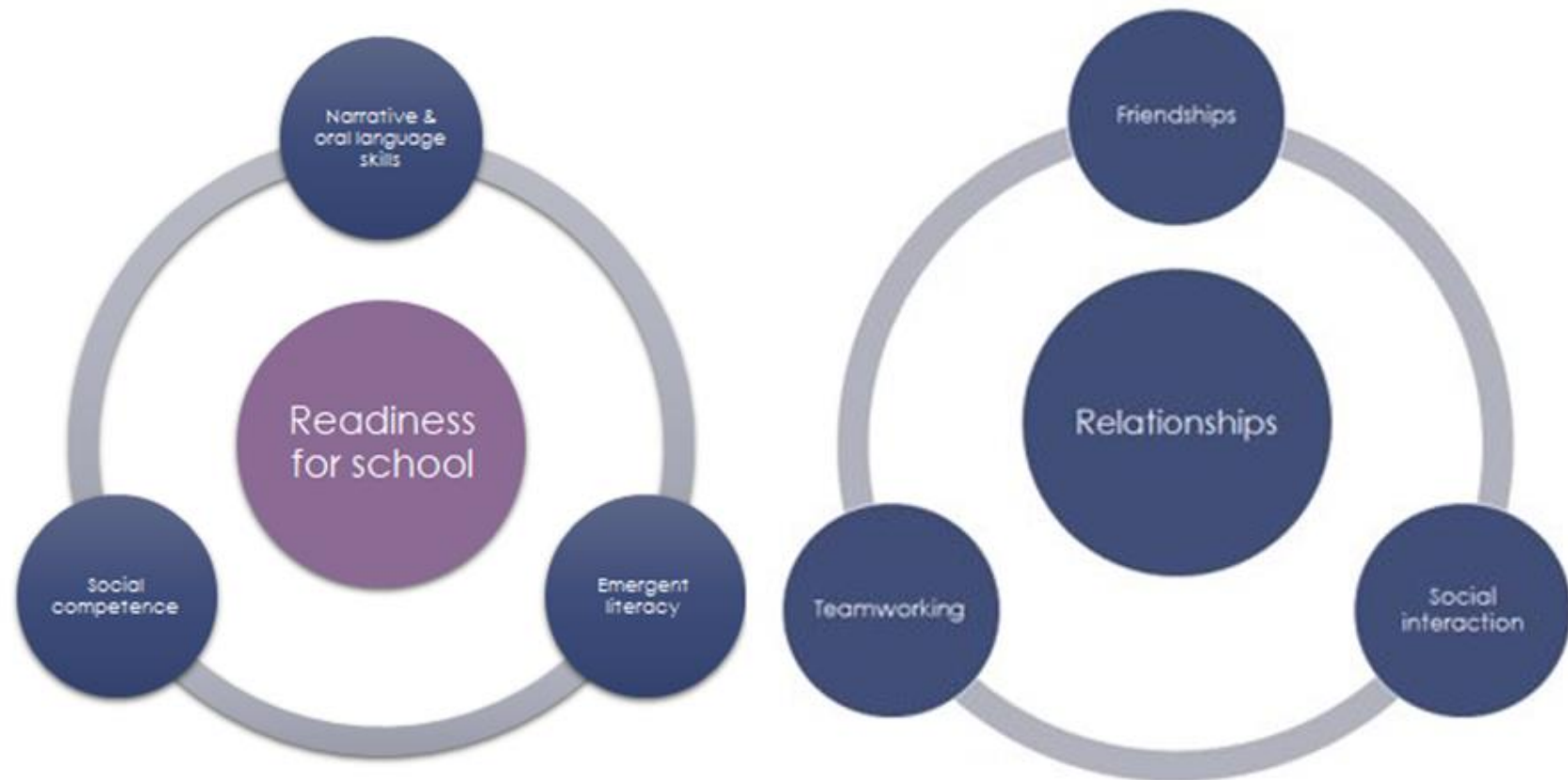


True Narratives - 5 – 8 years



These stories contain a true plot, including a problem in the story, which is resolved at the end. It follows a logical sequence of events and includes character development by connecting motivations and goals of the character with the plot.

Why is narrative so important?



There are 3 major areas that contribute to children's readiness for success in formal education:

- Narrative and other oral language skills
- Emergent literacy
- Social competence

What the Research says about Understanding and Telling Stories

There is a growing body of research that has argued convincingly that being able to understand and tell stories is a key skill for reading and writing success in the early years at school and that this carries on into long term school success. It has been found that narrative proficiency at age 5 is one of the best predictors of future reading comprehension. This may be due in part to the fact that narrative develops inferencing skills, which become important when children begin to read and try to make sense of what they are reading.

References:

1. Griffin TM, Hemphill L, Camp L, Wolf DP. Oral discourse in the preschool years and later literacy skills. *First Language*. 2004; 24:123–147. doi: 10.1177/0142723704042369. [[Google Scholar](#)]
2. Dickinson DK, Tabors PO. *Beginning literacy with language*. Paul H. Brookes; Baltimore, MD: 2001. [[Google Scholar](#)]
3. Kendeou P, van den Broek P, White MJ, Lynch JS. Predicting reading comprehension in early elementary school: The independent contributions of oral language and decoding skills. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 2009; 101:765–778. doi: 10.1037/a0015956. [[Google Scholar](#)]
4. Reese E, Suggate S, Long J, Schaughency E. Children's oral narrative and reading skills in the first 3 years of reading instruction. *Reading & Writing*. 2010; 23:627–644. doi: 10.1007/s11145-009-9175-9. [[Google Scholar](#)]
5. [Using a narrative- and play-based activity to promote low-income preschoolers' oral language, emergent literacy, and social competence \(nih.gov\)](#). Ageliki Nicolopoulou, Kai Schnabel Cortina, Hande Ilgaz, Carolyn Brockmeyer Cates, and Aline B. de Sá: 2015
6. Catts, Fey, Tombin & Zhang 2002
7. (Kleeck, 2008) Gardner-Neblett & Iruka, 2015 Oral narrative skills: Explaining the language-emergent literacy link by race/ethnicity and SES. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(7), 889-904.

What the research says about the impact of narrative skills on building social relationships

Narrative is also a key factor in building, maintaining and sustaining relationships. We think in narratives all day long, no matter if it is about going food shopping, whether we think about work or our partner or children at home. We make up (short) stories in our heads for every action and conversation. We also tell stories to all the people within our social circle.

The brain has a capacity to construct a map of other people's intentions, and narrative gives us a way in to try and figure out the thoughts and feelings of others. This in turn helps to develop our social skills by allowing us to read the behaviour of other people, see things from their perspective, and change our behaviour accordingly. It helps develop empathy.

Personal Narrative

We tell stories to all the people within our social circle and we also tell stories to ourselves, as part of our own personal narrative. This personal narrative not only applies to day to day things, like sequences of activities we need/want to do, but also to the narrative of our lives. This links into the field of psychology and is concerned with the creation of a narrative identity .

The theory of **narrative identity** suggests that individuals form an identity by integrating their life experiences into an internalized, evolving story of the self, and that this provides the individual with a sense of unity and purpose in life. This life narrative integrates one's reconstructed past, perceived present, and imagined future. Furthermore, this narrative is a story – It has characters, episodes, imagery, settings, plots and often a beginning/middle and end.

Children's narrative identity is influenced by their opportunities for conversation and interaction with the important people in their lives. Research has shown that young children whose parents share more detailed personal narratives from their own lives tend to have more detailed and coherent personal narratives themselves by the end of the preschool age period. Sensitive and attentive listeners feedback more personal information (also known as autobiographical) when a child is telling a story of an event, therefore allowing them to develop more specific memories of that event – which contributes to a richer, more detailed personal narrative.

References:

1. McAdams, D (2001). "The psychology of life stories". *Review of General Psychology*. **5** (2): 100–122. [CiteSeerX 10.1.1.525.9413](#). [doi:10.1037/1089-2680.5.2.100](#).
2. [^]Kurzwelly, J (2019). "Being German, Paraguayan and Germanino: Exploring the Relation Between Social and Personal Identity". *Identity*. **19** (2): 144–156. [doi:10.1080/15283488.2019.1604348](#).
Hoyt, Timothy; Monisha Pasupathi (2009). "The Development of Narrative Identity in Late Adolescence and emergent Adult". *Developmental Psychology*. **45**(2): 558–574. [doi:10.1037/a0014431](#). [PMID 19271839](#).
- Singer, Jefferson; Pavel BAGlov; Meredith Berry; Kathryn M. Oost (2013). "[Self-Defining Memories, Scripts, and the Life Story: Narrative Identity in Personality and Psychotherapy](#)". *Journal of Personality*. **81** (6): 569–582.

Recommended Resources for Narrative

Parents and Education

- <https://www.storycubes.com/en/> - Dice for story telling
- <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/304/304917/you-choose-fairy-tales/9780141378978.html> - You Choose Story books – Pippa Goodhart & Nick Sharat
- <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Theres-Monster-Your-Book-Fletcher/dp/0141376104> - Stories that encourage participation
- [Little Rabbit: 1](#), by Jörg Mühle. More participation stories
- <https://www.bookdepository.com/Story-Path-Kate-Baker/9781783704477> - The Story Path, free choice story
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5VOPGMNqiU> – Story Path tiny teaser
- <https://uk.mrswordsmith.com/?location=GB> – Resources for storytelling, vocabulary and phonics
- <https://www.blacksheeppress.co.uk/product-category/education/narrative-approach-to-learning-language/> - Narrative resources from Blacksheep Press
- <https://www.blacksheeppress.co.uk/product-category/education/mentalhealth-wellbeing/> - Mental Health and Well being, Blacksheep Press
- <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Language-Behaviour-Emotions-Practical-Children/dp/0367331837> - Language for Behaviour and Emotions, Anna Branagan & Melanie Cross
- <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/booklists/w/wordless-picture-books-for-children/> - Wordless stories

Education

For 5-7 year olds:

- *Speaking and Listening through Narrative, ages 5-7*. Black Sheep Press
- *Communication & Language Activities. Running Groups for School-Aged Children*. Hackney SLT Service, 2013 (suitable for KS1 and KS2)
- <https://www.talkforwritingshop.com/product-page/talk-for-writing-in-the-early-years> – Talk for Writing in the Early Years, Pie Corbett and Julia Strong

For 7–11 year olds:

- *From Oral to Written Narrative*, Black Sheep Press
- *Language for Behaviour and Emotions: A Practical Guide to Working with Children and Young People* (suitable for KS2-4), Branagan, Cross, and Parsons, 2020
- <https://www.talkforwritingshop.com/product-page/creating-storytellers-and-writers-38-online-video-clips> – Pie Corbett
- <https://www.talkforwritingshop.com/product-page/talk-for-writing-across-curriculum> –Pie Corbett

For young people 11+:

- *Narrative intervention Programme* (V. Joffe, 2011)
- *Secondary Talk Narrative*, KS3- 4, Black Sheep Press