Personal narratives with young people who have SLCNs

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Openstorytellers
Complex SLCNs broad definition

• Young people with severe difficulties in communication, speech and language
  – Primary
  – Secondary to other developmental disabilities: ASD, Intellectual Disabilities, physical disabilities, EBD
  – *Bercow Report 2008*

• Who find it hard to communicate their ideas, wishes, needs and experience without support and specific intervention
Narrative and child development

• Literacy and educational achievement
  • McCabe, 2008 (review); Hulme & Snowling, 2009

• Memory

• Attachment & social-emotional development
  • Boudreau, 2008; Killick & Thomas, 2010; Mello, 2001; Fivush, 2011

• Identity
  • Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Baumann, 1996< McAdams, 1993

• Citizenship and social change
  • Davis 2002
What is personal narrative

• A personal narrative is....

• Recounting of a specific reportable experience

• That has meaning for teller and listener

Labov & Waletzky 1967
Personal stories

• More prevalent than fictional in 5-6 year old conversations (only 4% fictional) *Preece 1987*

• Interactions of five 11 year olds with adult, peer and younger child dominated by personal narratives *Ghezi et. al., 1987*

• Children produce better story structure in personal than fictional contexts *Peterson et al. 1999*
The very disproportionate frequency of personal versus fictional narratives in the daily conversation directed toward children also means that the former are more likely to be useful than the latter on a daily basis in social interactions.

McCabe et. al. 2008
What we know

• Storytelling in schools is seen as a literacy based activity

• Analytic, structural skills of narrative are privileged over empathetic social discourse

• Models and frameworks are structurally based (story grammar); applicable to children who are manipulating structural aspects (3-4 years)

• Formal curriculum confines personal oral narratives to early years and KS1/2

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Models of narrative development

**Cognitive focus**
- Fictional, literacy focus
- Intrapersonal origin (within individual)
- Emphasis on structure (story grammar)
- Told as monologue
- Mature telling not till c. 5y

Stein & Glenn, Applebee

**Social focus**
- Personal focus
- Interpersonal origin (between people)
- Emphasis on meaning
- Collaborative, scaffolded
- Process starts in infancy

• McCabe & Peterson, Labov
Narrative development

Preverbal
Memory Awareness of routine Discrepancy Fun and surprise Expression of feelings

1-2y
Memory for events Contribute to scaffolded narratives Inform High point

3y
Affect and engagement What ..where... ....and

5y
Causality Time, who, when why

6-7y
Structured Complete episodes, connectives, diversions

9-10y
“black coffee” gothic horror.. Peer focus And it was.. like...

Tomasello, 2008:
Narrative emerges early in development and is the driver for language
The gap

• An intervention focused around the recall and sharing of personal experiences
• Appropriate to children and young people functioning at early levels of communication development
• That uses effective scaffolding strategies
• To motivate children, inspire them with confidence and value their lives and communication styles
• To give them secure foundation in narrative on which to build
• Emphasis on relationships before literacy and cognitive skills
Reports from the pupils, their parents and teachers indicated raised levels of **social and emotional problems** and professionals need to be aware of the ways in which language learning needs can impact more widely on a pupils' development.

Impoverished peer interactions and prosocial behaviours were more closely associated with the ASD than LI cohort, reflecting particular difficulties with social communication in the pupils with ASD.

Notably, for the pupils with LI, social interaction with same age peers was a greater issue for older pupils (Years 5 and 7) than younger (Years 1 and 3) pupils. So while both LI and ASD groups showed elevated risks for socio-emotional difficulties, LI pupils recruited at older ages were more likely to experience difficulties in peer relationships.

Dockrell et al., 2012
STORYSHARING®

• A framework for the identification and sharing of personal experience narratives with friends, family, teachers and interested listeners
• Using a social, participatory model of narrative
• Focus is on building social capital, identity, relationships -
  • outcome may be academic achievement and literacy
History

• Work in a day centre with adults with high support needs where staff compulsively told stories of daily life with each other – but not with users of the service (Grove, 2007)
• Work with two families on recalling and scripting everyday memories
• Storytelling group in special school where children told stories actively together but could not make use of structural prompts
• Close observation of anecdotal telling
• Theoretical perspectives of Labov, McCabe & Norrick
Storysharing® features

• Inclusive
  – No-one is left out, no entry criteria
• Collaborative
  – Stories always told together with support from more skilled partner
• Multisensory
  – Creative sensory memories
  – Use of objects and props
  – Use of Ipads where appropriate
• Face to face and dynamic (oral/signed/VOCA)
• Validates stories about me and my life
• Focus on peer interaction
  – Peer mentor work
  – Use of group to motivate
Fundamental principles

• Stories are created around non-routine reportable events.
• Using existing communication resources to the full, building on what the child can do.
• Emotion and feeling lie at the heart of the story.
• We learn to tell stories by participating in the act of storymaking and storytelling.
• We tell stories collaboratively with others, in adulthood as well as childhood.
• Adults scaffold storytelling with children, by accepting and extending their contributions.
• Personal stories are repeated over and over again, leading to scripting and growing independence in the telling.
• Naïve listeners are critical especially at the beginning.
Interactive strategies

- Avoidance of direct questions
- Prompting/sentence completion
- Use of gesture
- *And then* link
- Repetition and extension
- Pacing and rhythm
- Modelling
- Matching communication styles
- Expectant pausing and waiting
- Active listening by audience
Facilitative classroom discourse

Observed most frequently
• natural gestures,
• confirming,
• imitating,
• open questioning,
• pacing and pausing

Observed less frequently
• extending, modelling,
• supporting listening skills,
• encouraging turn taking,
• scripting,
• nonverbal communication
• providing clear language choices).

Dockrell, J. et al., 2012 Developing a communication supporting classroom observation tool  DfE
Storysharing Principles

• An experience that is worth remembering and telling (reportable)
• Separates story elicitation from storytelling
• Collaborative telling – working towards independence (scaffolding)
• Repeated telling, gradually reducing the level of support
• Responsive listeners
• Accessible record

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RESEARCH OUTCOMES

2007-2013
Storysharing in adult services

- Courses for people with high support needs
- Encourage recording and sharing of small stories from past and present
- Staff are trained to deliver the programme
- 85 adults with complex needs
- 100 staff
- Evidence of increased participation in tenants meetings, relationships developing between tenants

People with profound learning disabilities don’t know how to have a conversation .... but this gives everyone a right to do this .... makes friendships between everyone.’

'I can’t remember other occasions when service users have willingly sat together - so unusual. It’s really exciting! I wouldn’t have believed it! It surprised me.’

www.mencap.org.uk/involveme
www.openstorytellers.org.uk
Friendship and community

• 15 children in special school paired with 14 mainstream children (Grove et al, 2010; Peacey, 2010)
• Children made relationships, demonstrated empathy and shared experience
• MS children reported being less anxious and fearful of SS children
• Contributed to closer collaboration between schools
STORYSHARING® with pupils with complex needs 2011-14

- Large all age special school
- Targets pupils 11-19
- One term (10 weeks) class based interventions; group and individual: average 10 pupils per class
- Intensive staff modelling and training, reflective practice
- Cross curricular whole school approach
- Use of digital media to support – i pads with apps
Participants

Young people aged 10-19 functioning at levels P1-L2 speaking and listening (n= 60)

Young people with severe and complex communication needs functioning at levels P1-8 speaking and listening NC (n= 38)

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Study 1: Discourse strategies and Narrative skills

- Convenience sample
- 11 students paired with teaching staff
  - 9 verbal, 2 nonverbal
- Within groups design: pre and post intervention
- 2 best continuous minutes of telling

Karen Bunning, Miranda Johnson, Lynsey Gooch
School of Allied Health Professionals
University of East Anglia
Findings
Post-intervention

• Staff significantly reduced the amount they talked; students contributed more
• Staff asked fewer questions, used more sentence completion prompts & statements
• Students initiated and acknowledged more
• Students expressed more feelings
• Fewer narrative episodes meant more capacity to develop and sustain a story
• Increased range of narrative elements
Study 2. Interviews with staff and families

1. Young adult’s skills
   A. Impact on communication skills
   B. Increase in listening skills
   C. Increase in confidence and engagement in learning
   D. Increase in interest in socially-related stories
   E. Impact on the expression of negative feelings

2. Home life
   F. Differences in effect between home and school
   G. More accepting of changes to routines
   H. “Storysheets” support communication with school

3. Communication partner’s knowledge and strategies
   J. Knowledge and use of Storysharing
   K. Increased awareness of the young adult’s skills
   L. Increased focus on what is communicated
   M. Increased use of story repetition
   N. Increased specific knowledge on how to support each young adult

4. Aspirations
   P. Aspirations relate more to interests
   Q. Higher expectations

Thea Cooke University of Newcastle
Parents views

• ‘He does tell more stories. Interestingly – the other day – he told me all about someone else’s weekend: what they’d done, where they’d been. The whole thing, he knew it all. 5 or even 6 sentences.’

• ‘She’s more animated, repeating things – telling me a story a couple of days after the event.’
Teacher views

Helen has seen “the increased confidence, the smiles, the laughter, being much more of a relaxed communicator…not being given closed questions has been refreshing for them…Their body language and freedom to express themselves have noticeably increased. They are very keen now to do the gossip, tell the story, ‘guess what happened’ scenario.”

From the staff’s perspective, “there is that awareness of finding a story and picking up on opportunities which helps to tune into pupils…. It has helped to support a much more nurturing, positive, way forward.”

“It can be a tool for developing friendship and peer relations….., they can share with one another those anecdotal things – skills between themselves”.
Research in progress: Decision making

- **Individual level** - participation in annual reviews
- **School level** - participation in school council
- **Community level** - participation in community projects
STORYSHARING®
pupil voice

• School council work, 2012-13
• Dominated by verbal pupils
• Telling a personal experience led to increased empathy and awareness of the needs of others
• Required considerable effort from staff and pupils – topic recurred over 5 terms.
Observations

• Storysharing is most successful when
  – A whole school approach is adopted, with support from SMT
  – Staff are open to changing their interactive style
  – Good home-school communication
  – Time is allocated to prepare, gather resources
  – The curriculum is flexibly implemented
  – Everyone is alert for story opportunities
  – The young people can take an active role in the process
In conclusion

• Personal narratives are critical to the rounded social, emotional and cognitive development

• This is a gap in educational provision, with potentially serious consequences for young people with complex SLCNs

• Storysharing is designed to address these issues - we are now developing a positive evidence base for its effects
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