ORAL NARRATIVE DIFFERENCES OF CHILDREN FROM DIFFERENT
SOCIAL CLASSES AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty of The University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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May, 2006
The current study is a comparison of the oral narrative abilities of children from different social classes and different learning environments. Participants included 45 third grade students from three schools: a suburban public school, an urban charter school, and an urban public school. The majority of the students from the suburban public school are from the middle or upper class, while most of the students from the urban charter and urban public schools are from poverty. All participants were administered a language screening and received a numerical score, which was then compared to the age-based criterion scores. Each child either passed or failed the screening; those who failed were referred to the school’s speech-language pathologist for further language assessment. Two children with low scores, two with scores in the middle, and two with high scores on the language screening from each school participated in an oral narrative barrier activity. To complete this task, each child was given a picture with a title and was separated by a physical barrier from the researcher. The children created narratives about the picture, which were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. Several quantitative and qualitative components of the narratives were analyzed. The children’s narratives were then compared within and across school settings. Findings revealed that results of the language screening did not necessarily predict narrative performance; children from poverty tended to use more
conjunctions than children from the middle class; and children from the middle class tended to use more diverse vocabulary than children from poverty. Implications of this study are included.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Karyn Katz, for the long hours she spent reading and revising the content of this document. Her constant support, encouragement, and inspiration made this project possible. I would also like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Terry Hallett and Monica Siftar, for all of their hard work and cooperation throughout the process of completing this study. A special thanks goes out to the three schools who allowed me to enter their classrooms and work with their wonderful students. This project also would not have been possible without the love and support of my family and friends, especially my fiancé, Geoff, who spent long days and late nights encouraging me to continue with this project.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental aspect of educational, social, and professional life. From the moment they are born, children are immersed in an environment filled with language. Essential skills become incorporated into their cognitive schema and have lasting effects on a child’s ability to succeed and excel socially and scholastically, go on to college, and later gain the professional skill necessary for maintaining a career.

The way in which children develop language is an extremely complex process. Over the last several years, parents, clinicians, researchers, and others who interact with young children have begun to realize that children understand language long before they can actually speak. Parenting books are beginning to emphasize the need to surround infants with models of good language much earlier than realized in the past. A new phenomenon called baby sign language has been used in many households (Apel & Masterson, 2001; www.signingbaby.com). Baby sign language is a way for children to express their needs and wants before they are able to verbalize, some as early as seven months (www.signingbaby.com). Children typically begin speaking in meaningful words around the age of 12 months and over the next couple of years, a tremendous growth in communication occurs (Owens, 2005). The amount and complexity of language in children grows as vocabulary and understanding of syntax expands. When children reach
preschool-age, they are expected to know and participate in the basic structure of a conversation (Owens, 2005). The social aspect of language grows during the preschool years as children are surrounded by their peers.

An extremely important aspect of language development is acquiring the ability to participate in narrative structures. The beginning of narrative development typically starts in the second and third years of life when children begin talking about things that happened to them in the past and creating fictional stories (Owens, 2005). As children continue to develop narrative abilities, they begin to identify the participants, time, and location of stories. Narratives become sequences of events, rather than short sentences. By the age of seven, children generally have the ability to use prose and plots in their narratives. Children have typically developed all the basic forms of a narrative by the time they start elementary school (Owens, 2005).

When children begin attending school, they are expected to meet certain academic standards in order to move on to the next grade level. In Ohio, these standards are set by the Ohio Department of Education and apply to all students in school. Standards are set by grade level from kindergarten through twelfth grade. All schools in the state of Ohio operate under the same standards and proficiency tests are given to fourth, sixth, and ninth-grade students to ensure that all children are receiving adequate education and attainment of the standards (http://www.ode.state.oh.us/). The Ohio Department of Education describes three types of academic standards: content standards, performance standards, and operating standards. The content and performance standards are written around the following phrase: “what students should know and should be able to do.” (http://www.ode.state.oh.us/). The content standards outline the actual skills that students
are expected to achieve and the performance standards describe the extent to which these skills must be demonstrated. The operating standards are guidelines for the best learning conditions needed to achieve the academic standards. In Ohio, standards are set for fine arts, English language arts, foreign language, mathematics, science, social studies, and technology (http://www.ode.state.oh.us/).

This study will concentrate on the English language arts content standards, particularly the items having to do with oral narrative development in third grade. Many of the content standards for this grade level are shared by second and third grade. By the beginning of third grade, for example, students should have some background knowledge and emerging skills in presenting more complex oral narratives. Developmentally, children should have developed some narrative skills before they begin school; however, some children struggle with achieving this. The standards do not take into account any differences for children who begin school with limited language strengths.

All schools in the state of Ohio are required to teach to the same standards, but not all children come into school with the same foundation of skills. Concern can arise when teachers are required to take time to teach children skills they should already have, while in other schools, time can be more quickly devoted to learning the new third grade curriculum. When students begin school behind their peers, they may face a constant struggle to catch up and move forward.

Various reasons could explain the differences between the narrative abilities of typically developing and non-typically developing children. Some children have learning disorders or language impairments, which leaves a gap between them and other students in the acquisition of skills. Others come from low social classes or poverty-stricken
families, resulting in decreased communication skills. For years, researchers have attempted to pinpoint exactly what the differences are between typically-developing and non-typically developing children. Research has mostly focused on the differences between children with learning disorders or language impairments and children without these problems, while fewer research studies have been performed to find language differences between children in different social classes (for example, Greenhalgh & Strong, 2001). Some of the findings about the language abilities of children with learning disorders or language impairments and those of children in a low social class are similar. For example, children with learning disorders or language impairments tend to ramble because a difficult skill for this population is cognitively planning out a message before saying it (Simon, 1985). Similarly, children in poverty typically talk around their point and finally get to the main idea, causing them to ramble (Payne, 1996).

This study will compare the language and oral narrative abilities, outlined by the Ohio Department of Education academic content standards, of third grade students in different types of schools. The results will provide insight into possible language differences between children from different social classes and with different language abilities. These results will be informative and beneficial for a variety of professionals in the educational system, including law makers, educational administrators, speech-language pathologists, and classroom teachers; all of whom will be able to use the information obtained in this study to better serve the needs of children who bring different language patterns and abilities into the classroom. Once these differences are described, adjustments can be made in the classroom goals to accommodate the needs of these students.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Typical Language and Narrative Development

Before children are born, their hearing skills are already beginning to develop (Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 1999). In their first few months of life, children are listening to every sound they hear and eventually, they begin understanding what words mean. In these early months, children are introduced to many forms of oral narratives, including conversations, stories, and monologues (Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 1999).

Around the age of 12 months, children begin speaking in meaningful words, even though they understand much more than they can verbally express at the time (Owens, 2005; www.signingbaby.com). Once children begin to speak, parents tend to ask questions about the content of what they just said. This turn-taking system helps to teach the narrative structure of conversation and exposes children to the elements included in a story (Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 1999).

Children typically rely on their parents and siblings for language models, especially in the first three years of life, before most children are surrounded by their peers (Hart & Risley, 1995; Apel & Masterson, 2001). In their classic study, Hart and Risley (1995) found that by the time children are three years old, they have established patterns in the amount they talk, the amount their vocabulary grows, and their style of
interaction; all of which parallel the child’s parents in these areas. Once conversational patterns are established, children can successfully carry on conversations with adults, using new vocabulary and grammar structures (Apel & Masterson, 2001).

Developmentally, narratives are the first form of language use that forces the speaker to produce a monologue rather than engaging in an interactive dialogue (Simon, 1985). When children begin telling stories, they are usually retelling events that have happened in their lives to the listener who is typically aware of the content and context of the story (Owens, 2005). Similarly, when children read a book with adults, they are able to use ambiguous terms because the adult and child share the context of the book (Simon, 1985). At this point, clearly identifying the participants and setting of stories is unnecessary. This informational requirement eventually changes as children begin attending daycare, play groups, and school, where those listening to their stories may not have been present when the events occurred.

As they continue to grow, children develop the ability to identify key components of stories and describe events orally (Owens, 2005; Simon, 1985). Around the age of four, children are able to accurately recount sequences of events because of their growing ability to manage linguistic complexity (Owens, 2005). Eventually, children learn to successfully take the listener’s perspective into account when telling a story (Simon, 1985). By the time children begin school, they have typically developed the ability to include the major elements of a narrative, enhancing the foundation for conversational skills as they grow. These elements of narrative discourse continue to become more refined (Owens, 2005).
Measuring Success in School

The language competencies displayed by children in the first years of life become the important tools for academic and social success during their school years. Without the foundation of these essential skills, children may fall behind their peers when all the children are held to the same school standards.

The Ohio Department of Education requires children to meet certain standards at each grade level in order to succeed in school. These standards span many components of the kindergarten through 12th grade curriculum, including: fine arts, English language arts, foreign language, mathematics, science, social studies, and technology. The Ohio Department of Education academic content standards were written based on the skills students will typically need for a job or higher education when they graduate from high school (http://www.ode.state.oh.us/). Once the 12th grade standards were completed, standards for kindergarten through 11th grade were written based on typical development of the skills deemed necessary by the Department of Education (http://www.ode.state.oh.us/).

Because the focus of this study is primarily on the narrative skills of grade-school students, the standards discussed will be the English language arts content standards pertinent to oral narration. The second grade English language arts content standards are important to be aware of because they address the oral narrative skills that the third grade students have recently mastered. By the end of second grade, the Ohio Department of Education requires that students be able to: include relevant facts and details to develop a topic; organize information with a clear beginning and ending; and deliver simple
dramatic presentations, such as reciting stories, rhymes, and songs (http://www.ode.state.oh.us/).

Some content standards are shared by second and third grades with no differing requirements between the two grades; therefore, these skills can be expected to be emerging in children at the end of second grade and mastered by the end of third grade. The shared content standards of oral narration require the child to:

- demonstrate an understanding of the rules of the English language
- deliver informational presentations that present events or ideas in a logical sequence and maintain a clear focus
- demonstrate an understanding of the topic
- deliver presentations that convey relevant information and descriptive details (http://www.ode.state.oh.us/).

Other content standards that are shared by second and third grade have differing characteristics for the two grades. Second grade students are required to include relevant facts and details to develop a topic, while in third grade, students are additionally required to use multiple sources to gain this information. Second grade students will organize information with a clear beginning and ending and third graders will organize information including a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. Students in both grades will select language appropriate to purpose, but for third grade students, appropriate language for their audience is added. Finally, both second and third grade students will use clear diction and tone, while third graders are required to also adjust volume and tempo to stress important details. No content standards pertinent to oral narration are
written for third grade students without being mentioned in the second grade content standards to some extent (http://www.ode.state.oh.us/).

The participants in the present study are third grade students, allowing the prediction of some degree of knowledge for each of these narrative-related content standards. The key to conceptualizing this study is the fact that not all children develop typically. Performance differences may arise when assessing achievement of the academic content standards for children with differing language and narrative strengths.

Overview of Narrative Development in Special Populations

The children who struggle with developing the essential skills of oral narration may be at risk for academic problems when they begin attending school. Children with this language weakness may struggle in the achievement of the Department of Education academic content standards, impacting their successful progression through school.

A wide range of reasons may influence a child’s limited success with the academic standards. One reason that some children struggle with these skills is because they have a learning disorder or language impairment. For purposes of this study, the term “learning disabled/language impaired” (LD/LI) will be used to describe children who are not developing typically, as these are the two categories most widely used in the literature to define children with some sort of problem. For example, Paul (2001) describes three narrative features that are typically limited for children with LD/LI when compared with their typically developing peers: (1) maturity of the narrative, characterized by organization and type of story grammar; (2) use of pronouns, prepositions, and articles, all of which tie the narrative into a cohesive structure; and (3) use of vocabulary, language style, and story structure.
Another reason that children may have varying language abilities is social class differences. Hart and Risley (1995) found that the major difference between the language experiences of children in poverty and children in the middle class is not in the types of everyday language experiences, but in the frequency which these experiences occur. The fewer experiences and interactions a child is exposed to, the fewer words a child learns. Typically, children from poverty are exposed to fewer interactions and acquire vocabulary more slowly than children in the middle class who are exposed to a greater number of interactions. This finding, therefore, supports the conclusion that the more children are exposed to any language aspect, the more likely they are to learn (Hart & Risley, 1995).

*Research Findings and Narrative Development in Special Populations*

The literature concerning narrative development in various populations of children is extensive. The majority of this research focuses on the differences between typically-developing children and children with LD/LI, while fewer studies have attempted to illustrate the narrative language differences between children from different social classes. A problem arises when researchers who perform studies with children who are not typically developing define their subject groups. The terms used to describe those who participate in these studies reflect various terminology, with the definitions having some similarities and some differences. Often, researchers define the participants with learning disabilities using state department of education criteria, which vary from state to state. For example, one state’s department of education defines learning disabled students as those having a normal IQ score and at least a two-grade level deficit on reading ability on standardized tests (Ripich & Griffith, 1988). Another state’s
department of education defines learning disabled students as those who have at least one standard deviation of difference between learning potential and academic measures, possess a psychological processing deficit that impacts academic performance, and special education services are necessary (Montague, Maddux, & Dereshiwsky, 1990). Other researchers use their own definitions to differentiate those who are not developing typically from their peers. With such variation in the definition of participants, difficulties arise when comparing the results of these studies.

Other research distinctions include studies that compare the performances of children with LD/LI and their typically developing peers in different oral narrative activities, most of which include retelling stories the children just heard, generating stories following various cues, or both. Some studies found similar results on various components of narrative discourse, while others had opposite findings. General inferences can be drawn when the results of these studies are combined, requiring caution in the interpretation and implications of these findings.

**Narratives**

Previous research findings will be presented in chronological order to illustrate the development of knowledge about narrative differences in various populations over time. The most common activities used to explore the discourse differences between groups of children are oral story retelling tasks and/or story generation tasks. In story retelling tasks, children listen to a story and are then asked to tell the story back to the task administrator. For story generation tasks, children are typically given some type of cue, either oral or visual, and asked to narrate a story. Researchers generally compare the
abilities of children to perform both tasks in the same study and analyze the language differences of children between the two types of tasks.

Klecan-Aker, McIngvale, and Swank (1987) performed a study to compare the story generation and story retelling abilities of typically developing third grade students. Stories were generated from the students with an auditory cue to tell about the best thing that ever happened to them. Two story retelling activities were used in this study: one with a picture and one without a picture. Results indicated that, overall, typically developing children used longer utterances and more complex syntax when creating their own stories than retelling stories in either condition, possibly due to the use of episodic memory in talking about themselves. The children produced the most complex stories when retelling a story that was paired with a picture. The authors indicated that the visuals used in the retelling task may have allowed the children to organize their thoughts more easily, resulting in a more logical narrative (Klecan-Aker, McIngvale, & Swank, 1987).

Merritt and Liles (1987) compared children with LD/LI and typically developing children ranging in age from 9 to 11 years in an oral story retelling task and a story generation task. After the story retelling activity, the researchers asked participants comprehension questions about the story they had just retold. The children with LD/LI had the tendency to omit direct consequence statements during the story retelling activity. Both children with LD/LI and typically developing children answered an average of six out of eight questions correctly, indicating that both groups of children attended to and remembered stories equally well. Although both groups of children answered about the same amount of questions correctly, the children with LD/LI in this study had more...
problems answering the questions referring to relationships between story parts. The authors attributed this finding to the children with LD/LI possibly having a poorer use of story knowledge than their peers. For both story retelling and story generation, children with LD/LI used more incomplete episodes than their peers. This finding may indicate that children with LD/LI do not have a strong understanding of story structure (Merritt & Liles, 1987).

In their 1988 study, Ripich and Griffith asked children between the ages of 7 and 12.5 years to retell a story and generate a story. For the retelling task, some of the participants heard the story while reading it, while the other participants simply heard the story. For the story generation task, participants were asked to create a story about a sequence of five pictures. Results indicated that for the story retelling activity, children with LD/LI recalled the same amount of general information from the story as their peers, but children with LD/LI omitted more events than typically developing children, having particular trouble recalling the internal responses of characters. As the age of the children with LD/LI increased, the number of omissions decreased, indicating that memory may improve as children get older or that children of different ages use various strategies of story organization. Developmentally, internal responses of characters are the most difficult part of a story to understand, which is what the authors attributed to these findings. For the story generation task, both groups of children included the same amount of information in their narratives and showed similar story organization. Both groups of children showed more internal responses and internal plans in the story generation task than in the story retelling activity. The authors believed that the specific verbs used by the children in the story retelling activity held less emotion than the verbs
the children used to describe the pictures in the story generation task (Ripich & Griffith, 1988).

A study comparing the story retelling and story generation abilities of children with LD/LI and their typically developing peers between the age of 9 and 11 years was performed by Merritt and Liles (1989). For the story retelling task, participants simply listened to a story and retold it after listening to an example. The generated stories were elicited with a verbal cue from the researchers. Results indicated that children with LD/LI and their typically developing peers used similar organizational plans, which activated the cognitive abilities of story organization and story schema necessary for both tasks, indicating an internal consistency between tasks. Both groups of children used more complete episodes during the story retelling task than in the story generation task. The authors interpret this finding to mean that both groups of children were better able to organize a cognitive schema for story content when provided with prompts. The two groups of children also produced longer language samples during the story retelling task than in the story generation task. This finding was taken to mean that the story retelling task creates a more relaxed atmosphere for the children, relieving the pressure of creating a novel story (Merritt & Liles, 1989).

Montague, Maddux, and Dereshiwsky (1990) found somewhat similar results to those of Ripich and Griffith (1988). In their study, Montague, Maddux, and Dereshiwsky (1990) analyzed the differences in the story retelling and written story generation abilities of children with LD/LI and their typically developing peers in three different groups of children: fourth and fifth graders; seventh and eighth graders; and tenth and eleventh graders. For the story retelling task, all participants read the story as they listened to it.
For the written story generation task, researchers prompted all participants with the same verbal cue. The researchers found that children with LD/LI in all grade levels recalled significantly fewer internal responses of characters and significantly fewer total units of information than their typically developing peers. For both tasks, results indicated that children with LD/LI produced significantly fewer total units than their peers; displayed a basic, but not fully developed, idea of narrative prose; and had a less effective use of story grammar than their peers. The authors interpreted these results to mean that children with LD/LI had a less advanced schema of narrative discourse than their typically developing peers (Montague, Maddux, and Dereshiwsky, 1990).

In 1992, Gillam and Johnston researched the oral and written generated narratives of 9 to 12 year old children with LD/LI who were matched with typically developing children on three variables: same age, same spoken language ability, and same written language ability. The oral narrative activity elicited longer, but less complex, sentences from both children with LD/LI and their peers than the written narrative task. The authors indicated that this difference was most likely due to the children using more cohesive narrative structures in the written narrative task than in the oral narrative task. Both groups of children also had more problems creating an overall narrative plan for oral narrative presentations than written narratives, which the authors attributed to the processing advantages allowed during written narration activities (Gillam & Johnston, 1992).

One of the few studies which compared children’s abilities for just one type of task was administered by Greenhalgh and Strong (2001). The researchers investigated children with LD/LI and typically developing children ranging in age from 7 to 10 years
in a story retelling activity. The researchers found that the two groups of children used about the same amount of mental and linguistic verbs and adverbs in their stories, which the authors deemed insignificant because both groups of children used minimal amounts of these story components. The children’s stories also did not significantly differ in the number of different words used to retell the stories, a conflicting finding with previous research in similar studies that may have been associated with differing statistical analyses used by various researchers. The only significant difference found between the retold stories of these groups of children was that children with LD/LI used a lower amount of conjunctions and elaborated noun phrases than children with typically developing language. The authors concluded that conjunctions and elaborated noun phrases were the best diagnostic indicators for differentiating between children with LD/LI and children who are typically developing (Greenhalgh & Strong, 2001).

Summary

The major findings of the previous research studies about the narratives of children with LD/LI and typically developing children required extensive data analysis. A study exclusively of typically developing children found that these children used longer utterances and more complete syntax in story generation tasks than in story retelling tasks (Klecan-Aker, McIngvale, & Swank, 1987). Most other research findings compare the abilities of children with LD/LI and their typically developing peers.

Children with LD/LI were found to omit direct consequence statements in retelling tasks (Merritt & Liles, 1987) and omit more events and total units of information than typically developing children, especially when recalling the internal responses of characters (Ripich & Griffith, 1988; Montague, Maddux, and Dereshiwsky, 1990).
Children with LD/LI had problems answering questions about relationships between story parts and used more incomplete episodes than typically developing children for story generation tasks than retelling tasks (Merritt & Liles, 1987). For both story generation and retelling activities, children with LD/LI showed a basic, but not fully developed, idea of narrative prose and a less effective use of story grammar than their typically developing peers (Montague, Maddux, and Dereshiwsky, 1990). Children with LD/LI also used fewer conjunctions and elaborated noun phrases than typically developing children during a story retelling task (Greenhalgh & Strong, 2001).

Many research findings focused on the similarities of children with LD/LI and their typically developing peers on the two different tasks. Both groups of children answered about the same number of comprehension questions correctly about a story they listened to and recalled (Merritt & Liles, 1987). The two groups recalled the same amount of general information in story retelling tasks and included the same amount of information in story generation tasks, indicating similar story organizational schemas (Ripich & Griffith, 1988). Similar organizational plans for both tasks indicate that the two types of activities activate cognitive organization and story schema from the two groups of children (Merritt & Liles, 1989). More internal responses and internal plans were evident in the generated stories from both children with LD/LI and typically developing children (Ripich & Griffith, 1988). Both groups of children used more complete episodes and produced longer language samples in story retelling tasks than when generating their own stories (Merritt & Liles, 1989). Longer, but less complex, sentences were elicited from both children with LD/LI and their typically developing peers in orally generated stories than in written stories (Gillam & Johnston, 1992). Both
groups of children experienced more difficulties creating an overall narrative plan for stories generated orally than in writing (Gillam & Johnston, 1992). The two groups of children did not significantly differ in the number of different words used in retelling tasks (Greenhalgh & Strong, 2001). Therefore, one might predict that the narratives generated by children with LD/LI will be more incomplete and contain less complex grammar, but will include the same amount of information and follow the same organizational schema than the narratives of their typically developing peers. Furthermore, both children with LD/LI and typically developing children can be expected to include more internal responses and internal plans in story generation activities than in retelling tasks.

These findings are important for the present study because the differences and similarities of children with LD/LI and typically developing children are well documented. The areas of similar weakness for the two groups of children are readily apparent, which could potentially make teaching in the classroom easier in order to accommodate the needs of the majority of students. If parallels can be made between children with LD/LI and other children who are at risk for falling behind in school, the previous research will be beneficial for use with results of this study.

Poverty

Stanton-Chapman, Chapman, Kaiser, and Hancock (2004) identified the effects that risk factors have on the language development of three-year-olds from poverty. A preschool language test was given to the participants and the scores were correlated with the number of risk factors each participant experienced. Factors considered to be at risk were: maternal and paternal education level of less than 12 years, unmarried mother,
tobacco use during pregnancy by the mother, presence of a medical history in the mother, complications during labor or delivery, low birth weight, pre-term birth, and abnormal newborn condition. Language skills in this study were measured with the Preschool Language Scale-3 (PLS-3), a standardized test designed to assess the overall expressive and receptive language abilities of children between the ages of three and six. The PLS-3 consists of two subtests: auditory comprehension and expressive communication; the test was standardized using 1,200 children from various backgrounds to ensure that a representative sample of the population was included. The results indicated that any of these risk factors may have an effect on a child’s language development. Not only does the presence of even one of these risk factors affect a child’s language development, but a cumulative effect is evident; the more risk factors that are present, the more impaired a child’s language development will be. This effect is more exaggerated in girls than boys from poverty, which is interesting because in general, boys have a greater likelihood of developing language problems. The results also indicate that regardless of the number of risk factors, the overall mean score of the subjects in this study is lower than the general population due to the poverty status of those participating (Stanton-Chapman, Chapman, Kaiser, & Hancock, 2004).

Curenton and Justice (2004) performed a study of the oral narratives of Caucasian and African-American children between three and five years of age and living in low-income homes. No significant differences were found between the narratives of Caucasian and African-American children at any age. The results indicated that even the three year olds in this study possessed decontextualized language skills, which are the skills necessary to narrate a story without relying on non-verbal behaviors. Use of
conjunctions differed significantly between three-year-olds and four-year-olds, and four-year-olds and five-year-olds; this was the measure most useful in differentiating between age of children. The authors concluded that the development of decontextualized language in the early years is essential in determining a children’s academic success (Curenton & Justice, 2004).

By the time children begin school, vocabulary growth is difficult to speed up for children who have had a decreased amount of exposure to language interactions than their middle class peers (Hart & Risley, 1995). As the authors state, “Removing barriers and offering opportunities and incentives is not enough to overcome the past, the transmission across generations of a culture of poverty.” The authors indicate that by increasing the number of interactions that parents have with their children, vocabulary growth will occur, enhancing the overall language abilities of the children (Hart & Risley, 1995).

Ruby Payne, a former elementary school administrator, has performed extensive research about the culture of poverty and provides insight into the differences between social classes. Payne (1996) outlines three areas of language use that impact the narrative performances of people in different social classes: register, discourse, and story structure. The author notes that oral language of all speakers fits into one of five language registers: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. The frozen register is language that always stays the same, such as the Lord’s Prayer or marriage vows. Formal register is the standard syntax and word choice typically used in work or school. Consultative register is formal register used in conversation; it is not as direct as formal register. Casual register is the language typically used between friends, where assumptions of shared
knowledge are frequently made. Finally, intimate register is the language used between lovers and twins. The author reports that typically, people in poverty use the casual register in the same situations that people in the middle class would use the formal register. When speaking in the casual register of language, most of the meaning comes from the non-verbal behaviors of the speaker, most likely due to shared knowledge of the topic. The author states, “The work of Dr. Maria Montano-Harmon (1991) found that the majority (of the students in her research) of minority students and poor students do not have access to formal register at home. As a matter of fact, these students cannot use formal register” (Payne, 1996). Writing is often difficult for people in poverty because knowledge of formal register is required to replace the dependency on non-verbal behaviors (Payne, 1996).

Discourse is another area of language that is essential for producing narratives and is often an area of weakness for children in poverty. Payne (1996) defines discourse in two ways. The first is the manner that information is organized, which differs between the formal and casual registers of language. The goal of discourse in the formal register is to get straight to the point of the narrative or story, while discourse in the casual register talks around the point and eventually gets to the main idea. According to Payne, when children in classrooms use the casual manner of discourse, this can be extremely frustrating for teachers when they have to wait for children to arrive at their main point.

Payne also discusses a second issue regarding the development of discourse ability in children, the difference between primary and secondary discourse. Primary discourse is the language an individual is first exposed to, whereas secondary discourse is the language necessary for an individual to function in society. Children do better when
their primary and secondary discourses are the same, making this an important issue for children whose primary and secondary discourses differ. Both concerns are relevant to the issues that children in poverty face at school because, as was previously stated, children in poverty are typically exposed only to casual discourse in their home environments and may have limited knowledge of formal discourse until they begin school, potentially setting them apart from their middle class peers (Payne 1996).

Story structure has also been found to differ between the formal and casual registers of language (Payne, 1996). In the formal register, a story typically starts at the beginning, moves through the plot in the middle, and concludes at the end. In this structure of stories, there is a clear sequence, order, cause and effect, and conclusion; all of which are necessary for developing important skills like problem solving and inference. The typical structure of a story in the casual register is to begin at the high point, which is usually the end or the part with the greatest emotion. The goal is to quickly get the listener’s attention. Stories in the casual register continue in parts, allowing for audience participation, and end with comments about the characters in the story. Characterization is important to a casual register. Stories told in this manner provide high entertainment value.

Register, discourse, and story structure are three aspects of language that are important to take into account when teaching children in poverty (Payne, 1996). Standardized tests are given in formal discourse, so children in poverty who have no background in formal discourse will likely be at a disadvantage (Payne, 1996). Difficulty in the classroom may arise for two main reasons: children whose primary and secondary discourses are different are at a disadvantage when they enter school and are required to
know formal discourse. Secondly, children who come into school without knowing formal discourse must be taught formal discourse, which takes time out of the school day when students in other schools are being taught the standards. Payne (1996) suggested that if teachers teach to the standards without the students understanding formal discourse, the students are at a disadvantage when they take standardized tests because even if they understand the curriculum being tested, they will most likely not understand the format of the questions.

Parallels can be made between the language difficulties faced by children with LD/LI and children in poverty. Simon (1985) reports that people learn to control their syntax to linguistically code under various circumstances. This is typically a problem for children with LD/LI, who have problems mapping out their semantic intent with a clear main point and supporting points (Simon, 1985). Similarly, a common trait of the narratives of children from poverty is that they talk around their main point (Payne, 1996). Planning out messages before verbalizing them is a cognitive skill which, until mastered, causes the speaker to ramble (Simon, 1985). Pragmatic difficulties arise for many children with LD/LI when speaking in different situations and with different types of people; for example, many children speak to authority figures in the same manner in which they talk to their friends (Simon, 1985). Children in poverty tend to have the same problem, unaware that a different social expectation exists when speaking with different people and under various situations (Payne, 1996).

*Learning Environments*

Different school environments are required to meet children’s needs to achieve state educational standards. Some schools are public, others are private, and still others
are community, or charter, schools. Some schools have more affluence, while others serve children in poverty.

Various components separate public schools from private schools, including: cost, admission, governance, curriculum, teachers, students, special needs services, and class size (Thorp & James, 2005). Public schools are funded with taxes; admit all students; are governed by federal, state, and local laws; follow specific guidelines for curriculum; require that all teachers are certified by the state; typically have students that resemble the community; must provide services for students with special needs; and tend to have a higher number of children in a class. Private schools, on the other hand, are not given tax money and must fund themselves with tuition, donations, and fundraising; are not required to accept any student who applies; are exempt from many federal, state, and local laws; can design programs specific to the students; hire teachers who may not be certified, but who have experience in the subject they teach; generally have students from the same background due to the selection process; are not required to accept students with special needs; and tend to have a smaller class size with individual instruction (Thorp & James, 2005).

Charter schools are a fairly new educational phenomenon that are becoming more prevalent across the country each year. The first charter school opened in 1992 and to date, over one million students attend charter schools, which are stretched across 40 states plus Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico (Hill, Lake, & Celio, 2002; http://www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs_docs/index.htm). The philosophy behind the charter school movement places charter schools somewhere in between public schools and private schools. A charter is an agreement between the school and the authorizer, or
public body that grants the charter (Miron & Nelson, 2002). This document outlines the conditions under which the school will operate and the goals the school must meet in order for the school to remain open (Miron & Nelson, 2002). Charters can be taken away, thus closing the school, for not upholding the terms of the agreement with the authorizing institution at any time (Hassel, 1999). Because the majority of charter schools have stayed open two years or less, the long-term effects on student performance are unknown (Hassel, 1999). The US Charter Schools Organization reports that improvements have been made in student and parent satisfaction, but specific data are currently unavailable (http://www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs_docs/index.htm).

Charter schools make their own decisions about hiring teachers and how to spend their money, and are held strictly accountable for the success of their students; all of which make them different from public schools (Hill, Lake, & Celio, 2002; Hassel, 1999). Similar to public schools, charter schools are publicly funded, open to everyone, and must answer to the school board (Hill, Lake, & Celio, 2002). Funding for charter schools is granted based on the number of students attending the school (Miron & Nelson, 2002). If a charter school’s attendance goes down, the school is likely to go out of business (Miron & Nelson, 2002). The school board monitors the progress of students in charter schools and identifies students who are failing. If too many students are failing, the school board has the power to close the charter school (Hill, Lake, & Celio, 2002). Because charter schools are schools of choice and no child can be forced to attend, parents have the right to withdraw their children from a charter school at any time (Hassel, 1999).
Hill, Lake, and Celio (2002) outline four main strategies which they believe to have sparked the charter school movement. The first is the innovation/experimentation strategy, which is to create new schools that will serve as laboratories for testing new and potentially successful teaching strategies. A plan of this type for new schools must be submitted to and approved by the school districts that will outline an improvement plan to be implemented by the new school (Hill, Lake, & Celio, 2002).

The second strategy is the standards-based reform strategy (Hill, Lake, & Celio, 2002). The idea behind this theory is that if schools are freed from many of the rules of public schools, students will be able to meet higher expectations. This theory was developed under the idea that children who have problems attaining the state standards would benefit from attending different types of schools. Children who have different learning styles or who are at risk for falling through the cracks of public schools may thrive in a school environment that places less pressure on passing the state standards (Hill, Lake, & Celio, 2002).

The third strategy presented by Hill, Lake, and Celio (2002) is the “new supply of public schools” strategy. This strategy is based on the theory of opening up the school system to a set of new school providers. The funding for these schools comes from outside agencies, who are separate from school districts, and who decide on the curriculum and the teachers for these schools. In return, accountability for student success is based on fulfilling the terms of the school’s contract with the outside agency and on parents sending their children back to that school (Hill, Lake, & Celio).

The final theory is the competition/market strategy, which grants parents the choice to drive the entire school system to improve. Hill, Lake, and Celio (2002) state
that parents are in the best position to choose the best education for their children. Increasing the number and type of options parents are given for the school their children attend forces all schools to improve in order to keep students enrolled. All four of these theories combined were the driving force of the charter school movement (Hill, Lake, & Celio, 2002).

Miron and Nelson (2002) discuss some points of difference between charter and public schools, including financial, administrative, and social aspects of the schools. Financially, charter schools share the money that used to be solely for public schools. If public schools lose too much money, they may need to close, which would put teachers and administrators out of a job. Miron and Nelson (2002) report that since the beginning of the charter school movement, administrators in public schools have become more “customer-friendly” by increasing their efforts to communicate with the parents of their students and with the community. The authors state that critics of charter schools believe that charter schools encourage social segregation based on race, income, and ability (Miron & Nelson, 2002).

Various learning environments exist in order to accommodate different children’s learning styles. Several factors can influence the language characteristics that children present to third grade teachers and may include: development in the early years of life, the presence or absence of a learning disability or language impairment, or social class. Finding the impact that any of these factors may have on children’s language and narrative abilities can be beneficial to those who work in schools, regardless of which type of learning environment children are enrolled.
Summary and Research Questions

The literature regarding narrative development in various populations of children mainly concerns children with LD/LI. The similarities and differences in the narrative abilities of children with LD/LI and their typically developing peers have been outlined in numerous studies by many researchers. The narrative skills of children in other at-risk populations, such as children in poverty, are not as well-documented. Much of the research about children in poverty has been about the overall language differences across social class. Many of these overall differences would appear to have an impact on the narratives produced by children in poverty; for example, register, discourse, and story structure are important for all aspects of communication, but understanding these differences becomes imperative when teaching narrative skills to children in school.

The parallels made between the narratives of children in poverty and children with LD/LI include: difficulties with the ability to plan out a message with a main point and supporting points; and problems code switching between language registers when speaking in different environments with various communication partners. Difficulties arise when children in these populations attempt to tell a story with a clear main point or speak in different situations with different types of people. Because the research of narratives of children with LD/LI is so extensive, an awareness of the difficulties experienced by these children is evident and can be presented in the classroom. With more research about the specific narrative strengths and difficulties experienced by children in poverty, more parallels may be evident between this population and children with LD/LI. Classroom teachers and school administrators will then be able to better
accommodate their students because they will be able to recognize the specific needs of the children.

The purpose of the present study is to identify and describe different levels of linguistic skill and differences in oral narrative abilities of children learning in different environments and from different social classes. Four questions will guide the research of this study:

1. What are the language patterns of children with strong, middle, and weak language skills in each learning environment?

2. What are the differences in oral narrative abilities of children from different social classes?

3. What are the differences in oral narrative abilities of children from different learning environments?

4. What is the interaction between the three levels of language abilities and oral narrative skills across the different learning environments?
CHAPTER III
METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of 45 third grade students from one urban public school, one urban charter school, and one suburban public school, all in the northeast area of Ohio. Between the three schools, 20 of the participants were male and 25 of the participants were female. Participants ranged in age from eight to ten years. At the time of data collection, 23 of the participants were eight years old; 21 participants were nine years old; and one participant was ten years old.

Suburban Public School

The suburban public school used in this study contained only two grades, third and fourth grade, because all children in this suburb attend public school in the same building. The school had a total student body of 477 students, 235 of which were third graders. The class participating in this study had a total of 24 students, of which 17 students participated in the study. Nine of the participants were eight years old and eight were nine years old at the time of the study. None of the students participating in the study were on individualized education plans (IEP) at the time of the study. No major differences were assumed between the class who participated in the study and the other third grade classrooms in the school.
The suburban public school’s district is comprised mainly of middle to upper class families. In the school used in this study, a total of 62 students, or 12.9% of the school, were on free or reduced lunch, resulting from families falling below a certain income level.

*Urban Charter School*

A total of 250 students between kindergarten and eighth grade attended the urban charter school used in this study. This school had 28 third grade students, all of which were in the same class. Of the 28 third grade students, 18 participated in this study. At the time of the study, 12 of the participants were eight years old and six were nine years old. One of the participants from this school was on an IEP at the time of the study. Of the total population of the school, 96% of students were from poverty.

*Urban Public School*

A total of 299 students between kindergarten and fifth grade attended the urban public school used in this study, with one class of third grade students. Of the 38 third grade students, 10 participated in this study. Two of the participants were eight years old, seven were nine years old, and one was ten years old at the time of the study. One of the participants from the urban public school was on an IEP at the time of the study. Of the total student body, 96% were from poverty.

A comparison chart of the demographics of the participating schools can be found in Table 3.1.

Because participants were human subjects, this study was reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). Participation was voluntary and informed consent was required for all who chose to participate.
Table 3.1. Comparison of the demographics of the participating schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Number of Total Students in School</th>
<th>Number of Total 3(^{rd}) Grade Students</th>
<th>Number of Students in Participating Class</th>
<th>Number of Participants in Study</th>
<th>Number of Students Failing Screening</th>
<th>Number of Students in Participating Class on IEP's</th>
<th>Percentage of Students in School from Low Income*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suburban Public School</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Charter School</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Public School</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Students attending the suburban public school were considered to come from low income families if they qualified for free or reduced lunch. Students attending the urban charter school and the urban public school were considered low income if they came from poverty.

Because participants were minors under the age of 18, an informed consent form (Appendix B) signed by the parents and an assent form (Appendix C) signed by all students choosing to participate were obtained prior to participation. The students asked to participate were chosen from the regular third grade classrooms of the schools and were not separated based on learning disorders, language impairments, or social class.

**Procedure**

**Data Collection/Screening**

All data was collected over a period of one month during the middle of the school year. The researcher met individually with each willing participant and administered the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundaments – Fourth Edition (CELF-4 Screening) (Semel, Wiig, & Secord, 2004). The CELF-4 Screening consists of seven sections that measure various receptive and expressive language components. Items 1-28 on the CELF-4 Screening are administered to children between the ages of five and eight, while items 14-47 are given to children nine and above. Because the participants in this study
were eight, nine, and ten years old, participants of different ages were administered some different items on the CELF-4 Screening. Scores for each section are added to give each participant a raw score, which is then compared to a criterion score based on the participant’s age. All students who received a raw score lower than the criterion score for their age were referred to the school’s speech-language pathologist for further testing. The criterion score for children who are eight and ten years old is 18 and for nine-year-olds, 17. To ensure fair comparison of all participants in this study regardless of age, the raw score was divided by the total number of items tested (28 for eight-year-olds and 33 for nine and ten-year-olds).

The CELF-4 Screening was administered to 17 third grade students from the suburban public school, 18 third-grade students from the urban charter school, and 10 third-grade students from the urban public school. Percentages of items correct for participants from the suburban public school ranged from 21.2% - 96.4%, with an average of 70.83%. Of the 17 participants from the suburban public school, 14 passed the screening and 3 failed the screening. The screening scores at the urban charter school ranged from 6% - 92.8% of items correct, with an average of 63.22%. Twelve of the participants from the urban charter school passed the screening, while six failed the screening. At the urban public school, scores on the screening ranged from 24.2% - 89.2%, with an average of 40.39%. Two participants passed the screening from the urban public school and eight failed the screening. Tables 3.2-3.4 display the language screening results from the three schools. Figure 3.1 shows a comparison of language screening scores from the three schools.
Table 3.2. Screening results from the suburban public school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child #</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>DOB</th>
<th>Pass/Fail</th>
<th>Percent Correct</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1*</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5/19/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>A06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6/8/1996</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>A05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>8/1/1996</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1/13/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1/18/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12/3/1996</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5/2/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>A04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3/19/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>A03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10/15/1996</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>11/25/1996</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>11/5/1996</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>8/23/1996</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1/27/1997</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1/13/1997</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10/21/1996</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>A02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16*</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12/19/1996</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>A01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3. Screening results from the urban charter school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child #</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>DOB</th>
<th>Pass/Fail</th>
<th>Percent Correct</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1*</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9/27/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>B06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4/3/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>B05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9/2/1998</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7/24/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10/4/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3/12/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4/14/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7/2/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9/24/1997</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>B04</td>
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<tr>
<td>10*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>11/3/1996</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>B03</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3/18/1997</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4/14/1997</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12/7/1996</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1/11/1996</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4/23/1997</td>
<td>Fail</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>17*</td>
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<td>42.4</td>
<td>B02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18*</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10/12/1996</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>B01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.4. Screening results from the urban public school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child #</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>DOB</th>
<th>Pass/Fail</th>
<th>Percent Correct</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1*</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>Pass</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>C06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2*</td>
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<td>9/22/1996</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>C05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10/5/1995</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>48.4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12/12/1996</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5*</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9/8/1996</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>C04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3/19/1996</td>
<td>Fail</td>
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<td>C03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1/6/1997</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9/26/1996</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9*</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6/28/1996</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>C02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10*</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3/27/1996</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>C01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.1. Scores on the language screening across the three schools
Data Collection/Narrative Task

Following the administration of the CELF-4 Screening, six students from each school were selected to participate in the second phase of the study: two with low percentage scores, two with middle scores, and two with high scores on the CELF-4 Screening. Each participant met individually with the researcher to complete a story generation task. Participants were given a single picture with a title (Appendix D) and asked to create an entire story about the picture. A script was followed by the researcher to ensure consistency between participants’ knowledge of the task (Appendix E). Transcripts of narratives from all 18 children are included in Appendix F.

The researcher was separated from the participants by a physical barrier to decrease the participants’ ability to depend on non-verbal behaviors when narrating their stories. This barrier method was used to make the task more challenging for the participants as well as to encourage the participants to use more informative language to tell their stories to the researcher. Owens (2005) reports that by about four years of age, children typically have learned to take the listener’s perspective into account when narrating stories; therefore, children in third grade could be expected to think about the listener when engaged in this narrative activity. Other relevant research has shown that children in poverty tend to rely on non-verbal behaviors when narrating a story (Payne, 1996). With a physical barrier between the participant and the researcher, participants were unable to use and depend on non-verbal behaviors during the task, requiring them to use words instead.
Reliability

All stories generated by the participants were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Two of the narratives were chosen for a reliability check, which were transcribed by an independent party and compared to the transcriptions of the researcher. The reliability score of the duplicated transcriptions when compared to the transcriptions used in the study was an average of 96%.

Data Analysis

The Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts (SALT) program (Miller & Chapman, 2000) was used to analyze the narratives. A coding system was used to identify the specific components that were analyzed. The SALT program calculated a number of standard measures, including total number of utterances, number of utterances with mazes, mean length of utterance, and type-token ratio. Using mazes in a narrative causes the story to be interrupted, making listening difficult because of the fluency disruptions. Mean length of utterance indicates the average number of words used in each utterance. Type-token ratio is used to calculate a child’s diversity of vocabulary.

The SALT program was used in this study to generate and analyze other quantitative data, including the number of fillers, false starts, adjectives, internal responses, non-content words, conjunctions, and complex sentences. Because children in poverty tend to rely on non-verbal behaviors when telling stories (Payne, 1996), the number of adjectives and non-content terms used by the participants in this study may be used to measure how easily the participants are able to switch between casual and a more informative formal register.
Qualitative data were also examined in this study. Overall story organization was analyzed, including use of beginning, setting, and closing statements; development of characters; and use of action statements, time markers, and pronouns. Use of internal responses of characters was described. Developmentally, internal responses are the most difficult story component to understand, so at-risk populations may struggle with including these in their stories (Ripich & Griffith, 1988).
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

Following data collection, several components of the children’s narratives were analyzed to examine language characteristics and patterns. Quantitative components of the 18 narratives were analyzed with a computer program, while qualitative components were also studied and reported descriptively.

Quantitative Results

The Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts (SALT) program was used to analyze the quantitative aspects of the 18 narratives produced by the children. Transcripts of the narratives were entered into the program with specific codes for mazes, (e.g. fillers and false starts), adjectives, presence of internal responses, non-content words, more advanced conjunctions (e.g., “so” and “but”), and a variety of complex sentence types, including object complements, relative clauses, adverbial clauses, coordinated sentences, and subject complements.

By definition, mazes are verbal behaviors that serve to disrupt the fluency of a message. The use of mazes, which include fillers and false starts, impact the success of a narrative by breaking up the flow of the story, thereby influencing the experience of the listener. Fillers are words such as “um” and “uh.” False starts occur when the child begins an utterance, then stops and begins the utterance a different way. For example, in
the utterance “And he found, and he detected metal,” “and he found” would be a false start. Adjectives are words that describe or modify a noun, such as “golden” and “little.” Internal responses describe how a character is feeling, such as “He was very happy.” Non-content words are ambiguous words, such as “someplace” and “thing.” More advanced conjunctions are words that join two related thoughts, establishing a specific relationship between the thoughts. Examples would be “so,” and “but.” An example of an object complement would be, “He thought he would give up after the last hole.” A relative clause example would be, “There once was a bear that was looking for treasure.” Adverbial clauses are statements such as, “And then when he got off from his boat he found a shovel.” A coordinated sentence would be a statement such as, “It only had two friends and it was one coin in there.” An example of a subject complement would be, “And whoever found the treasure was going to be famous.”

The SALT automatically calculates the total number of utterances, the number of utterances with mazes, the number of words in mazes divided by the total number of words used, the mean length of utterance (MLU), and the type-token ratio (TTR). MLU, in this case, is a calculation of the average number of words used per utterance. TTR is a measure of the number of different words divided by the number of total words used in the narrative. A TTR closer to 1.0 indicates a greater diversity of vocabulary, while a TTR closer to 0.0 indicates little vocabulary variation.

**Within School Comparisons**

**Suburban Public School.** The children at this school varied in their use of the studied components of narratives. Table 4.1 provides information about the quantitative characteristics of the narratives produced by children from the suburban public school.
Table 4.1. Quantitative components of narratives from the suburban public school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total # of Utterances</th>
<th># of Utterances with Mazes</th>
<th>Utterances with Mazes/Total Utterances</th>
<th>Mean Length of Utterance</th>
<th>Type-Token Ratio</th>
<th># of Fillers</th>
<th># of False Starts</th>
<th># of Adjectives</th>
<th># of Internal Responses</th>
<th># of Non-Content Words</th>
<th># of Conj.</th>
<th># &amp; Type of Complex Sentences*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low-A01</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1-rc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low-A02</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1-ac 1-rc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mid-A03</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1-oc 2-rc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mid-A04</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High-A05</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-ac 1-rc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High-A06</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*oc=object complement; ac=adverbial clause; rc=relative clause; cs=coordinate sentence; sc=subject complement
The child with the lowest language skills (A01) produced a total of 4 utterances, 3 of which contained mazes, i.e., 75%. This child’s narrative had an MLU of 8.00 and a TTR of 0.91. This narrative contained 6 fillers, 0 false starts, 2 adjectives, 0 internal responses, 3 non-content words, 0 conjunctions, and 1 relative clause. The frequency of message disruptions as well as non-content words in this short narrative influenced the clarity of the presentation for the listener. The next child (A02) produced a narrative with a total of 6 utterances, 2 of which contained mazes, or 33%. The MLU was 8.67 for this child’s narrative, with a TTR of 0.75. This child used 0 fillers, false starts, adjectives, and internal responses; 1 non-content word; 0 conjunctions; 1 adverbial clause; and 1 relative clause.

One of the children with mid-level language skills (A03) produced a narrative with 28 utterances, 4 of which had mazes. Of the total utterances produced, 14% contained mazes. This child’s narrative had an MLU of 6.86 and a TTR of 0.46. This narrative contained 0 fillers, 1 false start, 2 adjectives, 0 internal responses and non-content words, 11 conjunctions, 1 object complement, and 2 relative clauses. For this child, increased fluency and the structuring of the narrative with conjunctions aided the listener in following the discourse. The next child (A04) produced a total of 5 utterances, 2 of which contained mazes. Forty percent of the total utterances, therefore, included mazes. This child’s narrative had an MLU of 7.00 and a TTR of 0.66. Although this child had 2 utterances with mazes, neither contained fillers or false starts. The narrative included 1 adjective, and 0 internal responses, non-content words, conjunctions, and complex sentences. This child’s narrative displayed more complex linguistic components than the previously mentioned students.
The first child with high-level language skills (A05) had a total of 22 utterances, 7 of which contained mazes. Thirty two percent of the total utterances included mazes. The MLU for this child’s narrative was 7.18, with a TTR of 0.56. This narrative contained 5 fillers, 1 false start, 11 adjectives, 0 internal responses and non-content words, 1 conjunction, 1 adverbial clause, and 1 relative clause. The child with the highest language skills (A06) produced a total of 6 utterances, 3 of which contained mazes. Of the total utterances produced, 50% included mazes. This child’s narrative had a MLU of 5.50 and a TTR of 0.76. This child produced 0 fillers, 3 false starts, 1 adjective, 0 internal responses and non-content words, 1 conjunction, and 0 complex sentences.

Overall, the children with higher-level language skills had a slightly lower MLU than the children with lower-level language skills. The TTR and percentage of utterances with mazes did not differ much between the children’s language skill levels. The children with higher-level language skills used more adjectives and fewer fillers, false starts, and non-content words than the lower children. By using fewer fillers, false starts, and non-content words, the children with higher-level language skills enhanced the experience of the listener by producing a narrative that is clearer and easier to follow than the narratives of the children with lower-level language skills. All children but the two with lower language skills used some complex sentences and conjunctions to structure their stories.

Urban Charter School. The narratives produced by the children at this school also contained varying amounts and types of these story components. Table 4.2 provides information about the quantitative characteristics of the narratives produced by children.
from the urban charter school. The child with the lowest language skills (B01) produced an extremely long narrative characterized by constant interruptions, with little content regarding the picture stimulus. The child’s narrative continued for almost 10 minutes and was concluded by a prompt from the researcher. It is of note that this child failed the language screening with a score that was considered an outlier because it was so much lower than the other children in the class (see Figure 3.1). This child produced a total of 47 utterances, 41 of which contained mazes. Of the total utterances produced, 92% included mazes. This child had a MLU of 7.32 and a TTR of 0.35. Contained in this child’s narrative were 19 fillers, 76 false starts, 10 adjectives, 2 internal responses, 1 non-content word, 8 conjunctions, 2 adverbial clauses, 1 coordinated sentence, 2 object complements, and 1 relative clause. The next child (B02) produced a narrative with 10 utterances, 8 of which contained mazes. Eighty percent of the total utterances included mazes. The MLU for this child’s narrative was 12.00 and the TTR was 0.49. This child produced 16 fillers, 18 false starts, 2 adjectives, 0 internal responses and non-content words, 4 conjunctions, and 1 subject complement. While the fluency of this child’s narrative was interrupted by the extensive use of mazes including fillers and false starts, this narrative was much more fluent than the narrative produced by the child with a lower score on the language screening.

The first child with mid-level language skills (B03) produced 10 utterances, 4 of which included mazes. Forty percent of the total utterances produced contained mazes. The MLU for this child was 8.30 and the TTR was 0.54. This child included 3 fillers, 3 false starts, 3 adjectives, 3 internal responses, 0 non-content words, 3 conjunctions, 1 object complement, and 3 relative clauses. The use of more advanced language tools was
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total # of Utterances</th>
<th># of Utterances with Mazes</th>
<th>Utterances with Mazes/Total Utterances</th>
<th>Mean Length of Utterance</th>
<th>Type-Token Ratio</th>
<th># of Fillers</th>
<th># of False Starts</th>
<th># of Adjectives</th>
<th># of Internal Responses</th>
<th># of Non-Content Words</th>
<th># of Conj.</th>
<th># &amp; Type of Complex Sentences*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-B01 9min, 25sec.</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2-ac 1-cs 2-oc 1-re</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-B02 1min, 27sec.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1-sc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-B03 1min, 2sec.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1-oc 3-re</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-B04 40sec.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2-re 1-sc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-B05 24sec.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-B06 1min, 2sec.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>8.44</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1-oc 2-re</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*oe=object complement; ac=adverbial clause; rc=relative clause; cs=coordinate sentence; sc=subject complement
evident for this child. The next child (B04) produced 6 total utterances, 1 of which contained mazes. Sixteen percent of the total utterances produced in this child’s narrative included mazes. This child had a MLU of 9.00 and a TTR of 0.65. This child produced 1 filler, 1 false start, 2 adjectives, 2 internal responses, 2 non-content words, 0 conjunctions, 2 relative clauses, and 1 subject complement.

The next child (B05) was the first with high-level language skills and produced a total of 5 utterances, 2 of which included mazes. Forty percent of the total utterances produced contained mazes. This child’s narrative had a MLU of 6.80 and a TTR of 0.68. This narrative contained 3 fillers, 2 false starts, 1 adjective, and 0 internal responses, non-content words, conjunctions, and complex sentences. The child with the highest language skills (B06) produced a narrative with 9 utterances, 6 of which contained mazes. Of the total utterances produced, 67% included mazes. This child had a MLU of 8.44 and a TTR of 0.53. This narrative contained 1 filler, 6 false starts, 1 adjective, 0 internal responses and non-content words, 4 conjunctions, 1 object complement, and 2 relative clauses.

Overall, a large difference was seen between the narrative abilities of the children with low-level language skills and the children with higher-level language skills. The children with higher-level language skills had lower MLU and slightly higher TTR than the children with lower-level language skills. The lower children used more mazes, fillers, and false starts than the higher children. Use of complex sentences increased as the language skill level of the children increased. This trend of increasing complexity of narrative components was predictable from the scores on the language screening by these children.
Urban Public School. The children at this school, like the other two schools, produced narratives with a variety of quantitative story characteristics. Table 4.3 provides information about the quantitative characteristics of the narratives produced by children from the urban public school. The child with the lowest language skills (C01) produced a narrative with 27 total utterances, 14 of which contained mazes. Of the total utterances produced, 52% included mazes. This child had a MLU of 7.50 and a TTR of 0.47. The narrative produced by this child contained 2 fillers, 24 false starts, 4 adjectives, 0 internal responses, 1 non-content word, 2 conjunctions, 4 object complements, and 1 relative clause. For this child, fluency was of concern, but linguistic devices were present that helped support the structure of the narrative. The next child (C02) produced 5 total utterances, 1 of which contained mazes. Of the total utterances produced, 20% included mazes. This child’s MLU was 6.67 and TTR was 0.85. This child’s narrative included 0 fillers, 1 false start, 1 adjective, 0 internal responses and non-content words, 1 conjunction, 1 object complement, and 2 relative clauses.

The first child with mid-level language skills (C03) produced 6 total utterances, one of which included mazes. Of the total utterances produced, 17% contained mazes. This child had a MLU of 3.50 and a TTR of 0.76. The narrative produced by this child contained 1 filler and 0 false starts, adjectives, internal responses, non-content words, conjunctions, and complex sentences. The next child (C04) produced 4 total utterances, 3 of which contained mazes. Seventy-five percent of the utterances produced included mazes. This child’s MLU was 8.25 and TTR was 0.76. This child’s narrative contained 4 fillers and 0 false starts, adjectives, internal responses, non-content words, conjunctions, and complex sentences. Although scores on the language screening were
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total # of Utterances</th>
<th># of Utterances with Mazes</th>
<th>Utterances with Mazes/Total Utterances</th>
<th>Mean Length of Utterance</th>
<th>Type-Token Ratio</th>
<th># of Fillers</th>
<th># of False Starts</th>
<th># of Adjectives</th>
<th># of Internal Responses</th>
<th># of Non-Content Words</th>
<th># of Conj.</th>
<th># &amp; Type of Complex Sentences*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-C01 2min, 2sec.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4-oC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-C02 32sec.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-oC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-C03 4min.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2-rc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-C04 1min, 24sec.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-C05 1min, 21sec.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>9.56</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1-ac 2-oc 3-rc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-C06 57sec.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1-ac</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*oc=object complement; ac=adverbial clause; rc=relative clause; cs=coordinate sentence; sc=subject complement
higher than children C01 and C02, these two children did not utilize language that enhanced the production of their narratives.

The first child with high-level language skills (C05) produced 16 utterances, 6 of which contained mazes. Thirty eight percent of the total utterances produced included mazes. This child had a MLU of 9.56 and a TTR of 0.48. This child’s narrative included 0 fillers, 6 false starts, 1 adjective, 4 internal responses, 1 non-content word, 7 conjunctions, 1 adverbial clause, 2 object complements, and 3 relative clauses. Clearly, the higher prediction for this child’s narrative skills was realized in more frequent use of language strengths. The child with the highest language skills (C06) produced a narrative with 12 total utterances, one of which included mazes. Eighty percent of the total utterances produced contained mazes. This child had a MLU of 7.50 and a TTR of 0.54. The narrative produced by this child contained 0 fillers, 1 false start, 0 adjectives, internal responses, and non-content words, 3 conjunctions, and 1 adverbial clause.

Overall, the children with higher-level language skills used fewer mazes, but had about the same MLU as the children with lower-level language skills. The TTR was higher for children with lower-level language skills than for children with higher-level language skills. Complex sentences were included in the narratives produced by the children with low and high-level language skills, but not in the narratives created by the children with mid-level language skills.

Summary. In summary, the children with lower-level language skills from all three schools had the same or higher MLU as the children with higher-level language skills. The lower-language children tended to use more mazes in their narratives than the
children with higher-level language skills. The higher-level children tended to use more conjunctions and complex sentences than the children with lower-level language skills.

Between School Comparisons

The narratives produced by the children at the suburban public school and at the urban charter school contained more utterances with mazes than the narratives produced by the children at the urban public school. The children at the urban charter school had the largest percentages of utterances with mazes out of total utterances. The highest MLU came from a child at the suburban public school and the lowest MLU from a child at the urban charter school. The children at the urban charter school had the smallest range of MLU from lowest to highest. The TTR at each school was a fairly large range, from 0.46 to 0.91 (mean = 0.63) at the suburban public school; 0.35 to 0.68 (mean = 0.54) at the urban charter school; and 0.47 to 0.85 (mean = 0.64) at the urban public school.

The children with high-level language skills from all three schools used fewer fillers, false starts, and non-content words than the children with lower-level language skills. The children from the urban charter school used many more fillers and false starts than the children at the other two schools. Use of non-content words was scarce among the narratives from all 18 children. Narratives produced by the children at the urban charter and urban public schools contained few internal responses, while children from the suburban public school used none. Use of adjectives, internal responses, conjunctions, and complex sentences varied from children with low to high-level language skills, as well as between the three schools. Generally, the number of adjectives used in the narratives increased as the number of total utterances increased. None of the
children at the suburban public school used internal responses in their narratives, while one child with low-level language skills and both with mid-level language skills from the urban charter school used internal responses, and one child with high-level language skills from the urban public school used internal responses in their narrative.

At the suburban public school, use of conjunctions was apparent in the narratives from one child with mid-level and two children with high-level language skills, but no conjunctions were used in the narratives from children with low-level language skills. From the urban charter school, at least one child from each language skill level used conjunctions in their narratives. The low and high-level children, but not the children with mid-level language skills, from the urban public school displayed the ability to use conjunctions, although the number of conjunctions used was higher for the children with high-level language skills. The ability to use complex sentences was displayed by at least one child from each skill level at each school, with the exception of the children with mid-level language skills at the urban public school. The number of complex sentences used was generally higher from the children at the urban charter and public schools than from the children at the suburban public school.

The children with low-level language skills across all three schools had extremely high percentages of utterances with mazes out of total utterances compared with their classroom peers. Additionally, the children with lower-level language skills from the urban charter school had a much higher percentage of utterances with mazes than the low-level children from the other two schools. All six of the children with low-level language skills tended to use more fillers and false starts than their peers and tended to have less complex sentences compared to the number of total utterances included in the
narratives. The MLU for the narratives produced by the children with low-level language skills ranged from 6.67 to 12.00, but most were between 7 and 8. The children with mid-level language skills from all three schools had similar TTR, ranging from 0.46 to 0.76. Use of adjectives, internal responses, non-content words, conjunctions, and complex sentences was generally low for all of the children with mid-level language skills. The MLU for the children with high-level language skills across all three schools was fairly diverse, ranging from 5.50 to 9.56. The children with high-level language skills from the urban charter and the urban public schools generally used more complex sentences and conjunctions, but fewer adjectives than the children with high-level language skills from the suburban public school.

Qualitative Results

A variety of qualitative characteristics were also studied in the 18 narratives produced by the children. These included the development of a story structure in the narrative, the language used to establish setting, characters, beginning, and ending of the generated story, and the use of action statements, and pronominal reference to enhance the structure of the story. This descriptive method allowed for a comparison of the children within one school representing the range of language performance, as well as comparing the performance of the children across the school settings.

Within School Comparisons

Suburban Public School. The children in this school demonstrated a wide range of complexity in many areas of story production. Table 4.4 provides information about the qualitative characteristics of the narratives produced by children from the suburban public school. The child with the lowest language skills (A01) produced a short narrative
characterized by many revisions. This pattern resulted in a series of action statements with simple sentences that were difficult for the listener to follow. The next child in the classroom (A02) produced a story with more fluency, but continued the pattern of action statements, although time structuring was marked in the narrative. This child’s narrative had a clear beginning and ending, as well as some more complex sentence structures. The first child with mid-level language skills (A03) used a variety of action statements in her narrative, with a clear beginning but a fairly abrupt ending. This child’s story structure was strong and included many details. The next child (A04) produced a short narrative with many fillers. This narrative had a vague beginning and ending, as well as some non-referenced pronouns, with a dominance of action statements. The next child’s narrative (A05) was comprised of many details and a somewhat weak story structure. Although the content was complex, the story ended abruptly. The child with the highest overall language skills (A06) produced a short, content-filled narrative. The story structure was simple but included a clear beginning and ending.

Overall, the children from the suburban public school with mid-level and high-level language skills produced narratives that generally had a stronger story structure with more clear beginning and ending statements and were more fluent than the narratives produced by the children with low-level language skills.

_Urban Charter School._ The narratives created by the children at this school also varied greatly in the complexity of different aspects of story production. Table 4.5 provides information about the qualitative characteristics of the narratives produced by children from the urban charter school. The child with the lowest language skills (B01) produced an extremely long narrative with little content and a great many fillers,
Table 4.4. Qualitative components of narratives from the suburban public school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning and Setting</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Closing</th>
<th>Action Statements</th>
<th>Time Markers</th>
<th>Pronouns</th>
<th>Story Structure*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-A01</td>
<td>29sec.</td>
<td>“The guy dugged” “Someplace”</td>
<td>“The guy”</td>
<td>“That’s all I can think of about it.”</td>
<td>“Digged”</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>With reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-A02</td>
<td>27sec.</td>
<td>“Once upon a time”</td>
<td>“A bear”</td>
<td>“…finally found some gold. The end.”</td>
<td>“looking”; “digged”</td>
<td>“Then”; “for hours”</td>
<td>With reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-A03</td>
<td>1min, 37sec.</td>
<td>“There once was a story about a bear”; “one day”; “the beach”</td>
<td>“A bear”; “his kids”; “his wife”</td>
<td>“…they have breakfast. The end.”</td>
<td>“walked”; “digging”; “opened”; “showed”; “hide”; “bury”; “eat”; “wake up”</td>
<td>“Then”; “the next morning”</td>
<td>With reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-A04</td>
<td>19sec.</td>
<td>“He goes to an island”</td>
<td>“He”</td>
<td>“…he sells it at the store.”</td>
<td>“uses”; “digs”; “finds”; “sells”</td>
<td>“Then”</td>
<td>With and without reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-A05</td>
<td>1min, 48sec.</td>
<td>“This picture is about a bear” “A sandy beach”</td>
<td>“A bear”; “The bear’s name is Peter Clark”</td>
<td>“Can I stop now?”</td>
<td>“finds”; “going”; “digging”; “buried”; “wears”</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>With reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-A06</td>
<td>24sec.</td>
<td>“One day a bear was walking on the beach”</td>
<td>“A bear”</td>
<td>“…and it was buried treasure. The end.”</td>
<td>“walking”; “digging”; “hit”</td>
<td>“Finally”</td>
<td>With reference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Story structure was defined as the presence of a clear beginning with the use of some episode structuring and the presentation of a problem.

revisions, and repetitions. This narrative had a fairly clear beginning but an abrupt, unclear ending. Because of the extensive disfluency of the narrative, the story was difficult to follow. The next child’s narrative (B02) was more fluent, but still contained enough fillers to interrupt the flow of the story. The story structure was complex and contained a clear beginning, with an abrupt ending. The next child (B03), with mid-level language skills, created a more fluent narrative that followed basic story structure until the end. The narrative began clearly but ended suddenly. This child also used more
Table 4.5. Qualitative components of narratives from the urban charter school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning and Setting</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Closing Statements</th>
<th>Time Markers</th>
<th>Pronouns</th>
<th>Story Structure*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low-B01</strong></td>
<td>9min, 25sec.</td>
<td>“First a bear was walking down the street”</td>
<td>“A bear”; “his friend”; “the teacher”; “Jack”; “Mike”; “Jake”</td>
<td>“…and they lived happily ever after.”</td>
<td>“walking”; “touched”; “ran”; “digged”; “bought”; “teached”</td>
<td>“First”; “then”; “tomorrow”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low-B02</strong></td>
<td>1min, 27sec.</td>
<td>“Once upon a time”; “on the island”</td>
<td>“A bear”</td>
<td>“That’s all.”</td>
<td>“looking”; “digged”</td>
<td>“day and night”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mid-B03</strong></td>
<td>1min, 2sec.</td>
<td>“The buried treasure is about a bear”</td>
<td>“A bear”</td>
<td>“I don’t know.”</td>
<td>“looking”; “digged”</td>
<td>“then”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mid-B04</strong></td>
<td>40sec.</td>
<td>“Once upon a time”</td>
<td>“A bear”</td>
<td>“…he was smiling and was very happy. The end.”</td>
<td>“digged”; “found”</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High-B05</strong></td>
<td>24sec.</td>
<td>“There is a bear”</td>
<td>“A bear”</td>
<td>“…he saw all the jewelry in it.”</td>
<td>“digging”; “looking”; “opened”</td>
<td>“then”; “finally”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High-B06</strong></td>
<td>1min, 2sec.</td>
<td>“Once upon a time”</td>
<td>“A boy named Sirajj”</td>
<td>“…he had found them. The end.”</td>
<td>“looking”; “found”; “buy”</td>
<td>“years and years”; “until”; “the first time”; “then”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Story structure was defined as the presence of a clear beginning with the use of some episode structuring and the presentation of a problem.

descriptive vocabulary than the children with lower language skills. The other middle child (B04) produced a narrative with a clear beginning and ending, with few fillers and revisions. This narrative had a basic story structure, as well as a clear beginning and ending. The next child (B05) produced a short narrative with little content. This narrative did not include a beginning and ending, but contained more complex time markers than the previous narratives. The child with the highest language skills (B06)
produced a narrative with a clear beginning and ending. This narrative contained few fillers and revisions and many complex time markers and vocabulary words.

Overall, the children with higher-level language skills from the urban charter school produced narratives with more complex sentences and vocabulary words than the narratives of the children with lower-level language skills.

*Urban Public School.* Similar to the other two schools, this school’s children created narratives with a great deal of variation in complexity of story production. Table 4.6 provides information about the qualitative characteristics of the narratives produced by children from the urban public school. The child with the lowest language skills (C01) produced a long narrative with little content about the picture. This narrative was comprised of diverse vocabulary and had a strong beginning and a fairly clear ending. The story structure of this narrative was basic, with some simple conjunctions. The next child (C02) produced a concise narrative with a clear beginning and ending. The vocabulary and story structure were basic, but the story was logical and easy to follow. One of the children with mid-level language skills (C03) did not appear to understand the task and was unable to produce a narrative. This child required multiple prompts from the researcher to produce anything about the picture. When this child did talk about the picture, the sentences were simple but complete, describing a few aspects of the picture. The next child (C04) produced a short narrative with a specific beginning and no logical ending. The story structure was basic, with many fillers and simple vocabulary. One of the children with high language skills (C05) created a narrative with more complex abrupt, unclear ending. The child with the highest language skills (C06) produced a fluent narrative with strong story structure and complex time markers, vocabulary, and
Table 4.6. Qualitative components of narratives from the urban public school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning and Setting</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Closing</th>
<th>Action Statements</th>
<th>Time Markers</th>
<th>Pronouns</th>
<th>Story Structure*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low- C01 2min, 2sec.</td>
<td>“Once upon a time”; “One day”</td>
<td>“A bear”; “His little son”</td>
<td>“…clothes for school. The end.”</td>
<td>“buries”; “found”; “digged”; “spent”</td>
<td>“then”</td>
<td>With reference</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low- C02 32sec.</td>
<td>“Once upon a time”</td>
<td>“A bear”</td>
<td>“…and he found treasure. The end.”</td>
<td>“walking”; “found”; “digged”</td>
<td>“then”</td>
<td>With reference</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid- C03 4min.</td>
<td>“A bear dug up box of treasure”</td>
<td>“A bear”</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>“digged”; “looked”; “found”</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>With reference</td>
<td>No**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid- C04 1min, 24sec.</td>
<td>“On Tuesday a man found a treasure”</td>
<td>“A man”</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>“found”</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>With reference</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High- C05 1min, 21sec.</td>
<td>“One day a bear who lived by the sea”</td>
<td>“A bear”</td>
<td>“Do I have to write a whole story?”</td>
<td>“pick up”; “wondered”; “figured out”</td>
<td>“until”</td>
<td>With reference</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High- C06 57sec.</td>
<td>“One day a bear was walking in the woods”</td>
<td>“A bear”</td>
<td>“…and he was rich after that. The end.”</td>
<td>“walking”; “felt”; “ran”; “digging”; “find”</td>
<td>“then”; “finally”; “after that”</td>
<td>With reference</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Story structure was defined as the presence of a clear beginning with the use of some episode structuring and the presentation of a problem.

**Child did not understand task.

conjunctions. This narrative had a clear beginning and ending, with a definite high point leading to the end.

Overall, the narratives produced by the children from the urban public school with higher-level language skills were more fluent and contained more complex sentence structures and diverse vocabulary than the narratives produced by the children with lower-level language skills, although even the children with lower-level language skills were somewhat successful in structuring their narratives. The children from this school, regardless of language skill level, demonstrated a strong use of narrative elements that are
critical to story structuring, including beginning and setting statements and use of conjunctions and complex sentences.

**Summary.** In summary, the children with higher-level language skills from all the schools displayed more complex elements needed to construct a strong story than the children with lower-level language skills, although the children with all levels of language skill from the urban public school demonstrated the ability to produce more complex narratives than the children with mid-level and low-level language skills from the suburban public school and the urban charter school. The children from all three schools who were able to more effectively narrate a story generally used a clear beginning; a developed character; a statement at the end that clearly brought the story to a close; and more complex action statements, time markers, and pronouns. All of these components combined create a well-developed story that is easy for the listener to follow, visualize, and comprehend.

**Between School Comparisons**

The beginning, setting and character statements in the narratives produced by the children in the suburban public school and the urban public school with low-level language skills were less complex and more general than those produced by the children with higher-level language skills. The students from the urban charter school with all levels of language skill created narratives with similar complexity of beginning, setting, and character statements in their narratives, while the closing statements in the narratives from the children at the suburban public school and the urban charter school became more logical and relevant to the narratives as language skill level increased. The children with low and high-level language skills at the urban public school produced strong
closing statements, while the students with mid-level language skills ended their narratives abruptly with no actual statement. The action statements used in all the narratives did not vary much between children from different schools or at different language skill levels. The time markers used by the children from all three schools became more complex as language skill level increased. All of the children displayed the ability to use pronouns with a reference.

The children with low-level language skills from all three schools began their narratives with simple statements, continued on to develop general characters, and used simple action statements, time markers, and pronouns throughout their stories. The closing statements differed between the children with low-level language skills; two of the six children ended the narrative abruptly, with no ending statement regarding the story, while the other four children ended their stories with logical statements that referenced the story. The children with mid-level language skills from the different schools developed somewhat more complex narratives than the children with low-level language skills. The mid-level children generally used more variety in their narratives, especially the beginning, setting, and action statements. The mid-level children at the urban charter and urban public schools tended to have unclear closing statements compared with the mid-level children at the suburban public school. The children with high-level language skills from all three schools developed much more complex narratives in almost all areas than the children with mid-level and low-level language skills. The children with high-level language skills began their narratives with many details and used more complex vocabulary throughout the stories than the other children. Two of the six children with high-level language skills ended their narratives abruptly,
with no actual closing to the story. The other four children concluded their narratives with logical references to the rest of the story.

**Summary**

Overall, the children with higher-level language skills displayed the ability to generate narratives that were stronger and more complete than the narratives produced by children with lower-level language skills from all three schools. The children with higher-level language skills from all schools generally produced narratives with lower MLU; higher TTR; fewer mazes, fillers, false starts, and non-content words; and more complex time markers than the children with lower-level language skills. Between schools, many of the components of the narratives differed in complexity. The children from the suburban and urban public schools tended to produce more complete and fluent narratives than the children from the urban charter school.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Third-grade children from three different types of schools – a suburban public school, an urban charter school, and an urban public school – were given a language screening to generally classify children into three groups with differing language strengths. The two children with the lowest scores, the two children in the middle, and the two children with the highest scores from each school were then given an oral narrative barrier task. Each child was given a picture and asked to generate a complete story about the picture while separated from the researcher by a physical barrier. All narratives were transcribed by the researcher and several components were analyzed in a variety of ways. A computer program was used to analyze the quantitative components of the narratives, while a descriptive method was used to examine qualitative components of the narratives.

Four questions guided the research in this study:

1. What are the language patterns of children with strong, middle, and weak language skills in each learning environment?

2. What are the differences in oral narrative abilities of children from different social classes?
3. What are the differences in oral narrative abilities of children from different learning environments?

4. What is the interaction between the three levels of language abilities and oral narrative skills across the different learning environments?

Language Screening

The CELF-4 Screening is a standardized test that is used to “identify students who may need to be referred for further thorough language assessment” (Semel, Wiig, & Secord, 2004). Each child who was administered the test received a score based on the number of questions they answered correctly and either passed or failed the screening. Of the 17 children who were given the language screening at the suburban public school, 3 failed the screening. At the urban charter school, 18 children were given the language screening and 6 of them failed the screening. Ten children were given the language screening at the urban public school, 8 of which failed the screening. Although all children within each school were in the same classroom, results of the screening would suggest a range of language skills confronting the teacher. For example, the children in the classroom at the suburban public school received scores ranging from 96.4 to 21.2 percent correct. The scores from highest to lowest steadily decreased from 96.4 to 51.5, then a sharp drop occurred for the one student who received a score of 21.2.

Similarly, the children’s scores on the language screening at the urban charter school steadily decreased from 92.8 to 42.4 percent correct, with one child receiving a score of 6. The opposite trend was apparent at the urban public school, with one child receiving a score of 89.2 percent correct, then a sharp drop to the next child’s score of 54.5, which steadily decreased to the lowest scores on the screening of 24.2 (the score
received by four of the students from this school). Classifying the children based on the results of the language screening would suggest that some children have strengths that would contribute positively to narration or other language arts content abilities, while other children may be ill-equipped to achieve required performance standards.

The ability of the language screening tool to help guide the prediction of narrative performance is questioned by the findings of this study. In fact, many of the children who failed the screening, although referred for further diagnosis, produced narratives containing more complex story-telling components than their peers who passed the screening. At the suburban public school, the child who produced a narrative and failed the screening was one of the children with low-level language skills (A01). From the urban charter school, the two children with low-level language skills (B01 and B02) failed the screening. The four children from the urban public school with low and mid-level language skills (C01, C02, C03, and C04) failed the screening, but produced narratives that were more complex and complete than predicted by their language screening scores. The language skill level of each child is relative to the performance of their class as a whole on the language screening. Scoring high on the screening did not necessarily predict success on the narrative task, and those with low scores on the screening did not necessarily perform poorly on the narrative task.

Measuring up to the Standards

The Ohio Department of Education academic content standards require students leaving the second grade to be able to organize information with a clear beginning and ending and to deliver simple dramatic presentations (http://www.ode.state.oh.us/). By the end of the third grade, students are expected to be able to further organize information
with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. The Ohio Department of Education requires children in both second and third grade to deliver informational presentations that present events or ideas in a logical sequence and maintain a clear focus, and to demonstrate an understanding of the topic. Theoretically, all of the students who completed this narrative task should be expected to organize information, use a clear beginning and ending in their stories, demonstrate the emerging skill of developing a clear body, narrate their stories in a logical sequence, maintain a clear focus throughout their narration, and understand the narration task (http://www.ode.state.oh.us/).

Suburban Public School

The children at the suburban public school with higher-level language skills produced narratives with slightly lower MLU; about the same TTR and percentage of utterances containing mazes; more adjectives, conjunctions, and complex sentences; and fewer fillers, false starts, and non-content words than the children with lower-level language skills. The lower MLU from the children with higher-level language skills may have been due to the length and completeness of the narratives produced by the children; the children with higher-level language skills produced longer and more complete narratives than the children with lower-level language skills.

Although all of the children from this school demonstrated the ability to meet the standard of organizing information with a clear beginning and ending, the children with mid-level and high-level language skills had a stronger story structure, including stronger and more clear beginning and ending statements than the narratives produced by the children with low-level language skills. The children with low-level language skills used fewer utterances, with more fillers, false starts, and non-content words, to complete their
narratives, which would cause the utterances to be longer and more disrupted than the more descriptive, planned-out narratives produced by the children with higher-level language skills. These findings indicate that while all six children who produced narratives from this school were able to meet the standard of understanding the topic, the children with higher-level language skills were able to deliver their narratives in a more logical sequence while maintaining a clear focus more effectively than the children with lower-level language skills.

*Urban Charter School*

The children from the urban charter school displayed a wide variety of narrative abilities. The children with higher-level language skills produced narratives with lower MLU, slightly higher TTR, included fewer mazes, fillers, and false starts, and used more complex sentences than the children with lower-level language skills. The higher TTR of the children with higher-level language skills indicated use of more diverse vocabulary than the children with lower-level language skills.

Some of the children from this school were able to meet the standard of organizing information with a clear beginning and ending, while others struggled with attaining this standard. All of the children began their narratives with clear introductory statements, but a few were unable to end the story with a logical concluding statement. The children who struggled with producing an ending statement had low-level and mid-level language skills.

The majority of the students from this school were able to meet the standards of understanding the topic and presenting events in a logical sequence, but some students achieved more success in attaining these standards than other children. Maintaining a
clear focus was one standard that some of the students at this school struggled with, due to the disruptions of fluency in their narratives. As mentioned previously, the child from this school with the lowest score on the language screening was considered an outlier and spoke for an extensive length of time when creating his narrative, the majority of which deviated from the picture prompt. This child was unable to meet the standards of presenting events in a logical sequence and maintaining a clear focus when delivering this oral narrative, while his peers, even the other child who failed the language screening, were able to approach the basic requirements of this standard. As a standard shared by both second and third grade, the ability to completely meet the requirements is not anticipated, but the emergence of this skill is expected halfway through the third grade.

*Urban Public School*

The children from the urban public school with higher-level language skills had a similar MLU, used fewer mazes, and had a higher TTR than the children with lower-level language skills. Interestingly, complex sentences were used in the narratives produced by the children with low and high-level language skills, but not by the children with mid-level language skills. This may be indicative of the screening tool not predicting language ability throughout the scoring range.

One of the children with mid-level language skills (C03) had an extremely difficult time understanding the narrative task. This child had to be prompted multiple times by the researcher and still displayed some confusion about the task. None of the standards regarding oral narration were demonstrated by this child, which is of concern given that she scored as a child with mid-level language skills based on the screening
scores. With the exception of this child, the children from the urban public school were successful in attaining the standards pertinent to oral narration. All of the children used a clear beginning, and all but the child with mid-level language skills were able to generate a clear ending to their stories as well. The children, on the whole, maintained a clear focus, presented ideas in a logical sequence, and understood the topic.

**Summary**

Overall, children from all three schools were able to demonstrate some attainment of the standards pertinent to oral narration, although a variety of narrative skills were evident. With the exception of the two outliers from the urban charter and urban public schools, the children from all of the schools seem to be capable of meeting the standards that are required by the Ohio Department of Education. A range of success on the narrative task was apparent when comparing children’s performances.

**Narratives Across Different Groups**

The literature review suggested a number of potential differences between children who are typically-developing and their peers who are considered at risk for falling behind in school. These at-risk populations include children with LD/LI and children from poverty. The majority of previous research has focused on the differences between children with LD/LI and their typically-developing peers, while few research studies have concentrated on the differences between children from different social classes.

**Learning Disability/Language Impairment**

Ripich and Griffith (1988) found that when retelling a story, children with LD/LI had difficulty recalling the internal responses of characters, most likely due to the fact
that developmentally, internal responses are the most difficult part of a story to understand. However, when asked to generate their own stories, children with LD/LI included more internal responses of characters than when retelling a story (Ripich & Griffith, 1998). Greenhalgh and Strong (2001) and Montague, Maddux, and Dereshiwsky (1990) found that children with LD/LI used fewer conjunctions than their typically developing peers. Greenhalgh and Strong (2001) concluded that use of conjunctions is a good diagnostic indicator for differentiating between children who are developing typically and children with LD/LI.

**Poverty**

In relationship to social class, Hart and Risley (1995) performed a longitudinal study that described the differences between the language development of children from different social classes. They concluded that children from poverty have generally been exposed to fewer language interactions than their middle class peers. These researchers found that by the time they begin attending school, vocabulary growth is difficult to enhance for children who have had a decreased amount of exposure to language interactions (Hart & Risley, 1995). Payne (1996) discussed the differences in discourse of children from poverty and children from the middle class. Children from poverty are typically exposed exclusively to the casual register at home, making the casual register of language their primary discourse. The formal register is typically the primary discourse of children from the middle class and is also necessary for success in school for certain tasks, such as standardized testing. Children from poverty must learn formal discourse in school, making formal register their secondary discourse. When primary and secondary
discourses are different, children are placed at a disadvantage for success in school (Payne, 1996).

Current Study

In the current study, of the 477 students attending the suburban public school, 12.9% were on free or reduced lunch, indicating a small proportion of the students in a lower social class than the rest of the school. From the urban charter and urban public schools, 96% of the total number of students (250 from the urban charter school and 299 from the urban public school) were considered to be from poverty.

With this in mind, the results of the current study were examined to reveal patterns of narrative performance. Internal responses were used in some of the children’s narratives, although so few were elicited that interpretations must be made with caution. None of the children from the suburban public school, three children from the urban charter school, and one child from the urban public school used internal responses in their narratives. One possible explanation for these differences could be that the teachers of at-risk populations, such as children from poverty, may make a point of teaching these more difficult aspects of stories rather than waiting for them to develop as they would for typical children, although no substantial conclusions can be drawn from these data. Internal responses may be a helpful element in describing differences between children from different social classes for further studies.

The children from the urban charter and urban public schools tended to use more conjunctions than the children from the suburban public school. The literature suggests that use of conjunctions is a good diagnostic indicator for differentiating children with LD/LI and children who are typically developing (Greenhalgh & Strong, 2001). The
results of this study indicated that children from poverty tend to use more conjunctions for story structuring when narrating than children from the middle class. Therefore, use of conjunctions may differentiate children from different social classes. Previous studies would predict that children with lower language abilities would use fewer conjunctions than children with higher-level language skills, but the current study found that the children who used conjunctions in their narratives may or may not have passed the language screening. The presence of conjunctions may be another important component for helping children more successfully structure a narrative, despite limited strengths in other areas of language.

For the children at the suburban public school, the TTR spanned a large range, but did not differ greatly based on the language skill level of the children. The TTR for the children at the urban charter and urban public schools increased as the language skill level of the children increased; the children with low-level language skills had low TTR and the children with high-level language skills had the highest TTR. The mean TTR for the suburban public and urban public schools was equal, while the mean TTR for the urban charter school was lower in comparison. The range of TTR from the suburban public school was greater than the range for the urban charter and urban public schools, indicating that at least some children from the middle class appear to use a more diverse vocabulary (no matter what level of language skill they have), than children from poverty (see Tables 4.1 to 4.3). This finding parallels the findings of Hart and Risley (1995) that children from poverty have generally been exposed to fewer language interactions than children from the middle class, thereby making vocabulary growth difficult once they begin school.
Summary

In summary, the literature suggests that differences between children with LD/LI and children who are typically developing are apparent in the areas of recalling internal responses of characters and using conjunctions in generated narratives (Ripich & Griffith, 1988; Greenhalgh & Strong, 2001; Montague, Maddux, & Dereshiwsky, 1990). Differences between children from poverty and children from the middle class are evident in the areas of vocabulary growth and discourse (Hart & Risley, 1995; Payne, 1996). The narratives produced by the children who participated in this study were not conclusively different with use of internal responses. The children from poverty in this study tended to use more conjunctions in their narratives than children from the middle class; use of conjunctions in generated narratives may be an area to differentiate children from different social classes. Overall, the children from poverty had a lower TTR than the children from the middle class, indicating a more diverse vocabulary in the narratives of the children from the middle class. This finding is consistent with the findings of Hart and Risley (1995).

Narratives Across Learning Environments

As was seen in figure 3.1, distinct comparisons can be noted across the different schools. In fact, the level of screening performance provides the following interesting patterns:

- Children with mid-level language skills from the suburban public and urban charter schools are equal.
- Children with high-level language skills from the suburban public and urban charter schools are equal.
• Children with mid-level and one child with high-level language skills from the
  urban public school performed much worse on the language screening than those
  with mid-level and high-level language skills from the other two schools.

Based on these findings, the prediction that the children from the urban public school, on
the whole, would generate narratives that would be less structured and complex than the
narratives produced by the children from the suburban public and urban charter schools
would be expected. However, the children from the urban public school, for the most
part, showed strong use of narrative elements critical to story structuring, including
beginning and setting statements, use of conjunctions, and complex sentences.

*Early Storytelling Experiences*

Reasons for this pattern of inconsistent performance between the screening tool
and the narrative task from the children participating in this study required examination.
One possibility may be the differences in the learning experiences of the children during
their early school years. To investigate this possibility, individuals familiar with the
narrative experiences of the children in the school setting were contacted.

The children who attended the urban charter school beginning in kindergarten
were taught the curriculum by repeating answers as a class (E. Burtoft, personal
communication, April 7, 2006). Individual reading, writing, and sharing tasks were
discouraged by the chosen philosophy of teaching. Once the children from this school
begin in the third grade class, the students are encouraged to share information during
lessons, relate stories to their own experiences, retell stories in front of the class, and
write stories that are shared orally with the class (E. Burtoft, personal communication,
April 7, 2006). Students who attended the urban public school had extremely different
early storytelling experiences than those from the urban charter school. Beginning in kindergarten, the children attending the urban public school learned to create their own stories and share them with the class (P. Vincente, personal communication, April 6, 2006). Between first and third grade, these experiences are enhanced by writing longer stories that are shared with the class, the principal, and even patrons of a local coffee house (P. Vincente, personal communication, April 6, 2006). Response was not obtained from the suburban public school regarding the early storytelling experiences of those students.

The differences in the oral narrative experiences of the children who attended these schools may have contributed to the findings of this study. Based on these statements from the schools, it may be important to recognize the contribution of early school experiences in influencing the ability of children to work toward performance standards involving narrative components.

**Overall Conclusions**

Some overall patterns have been evidenced in the analysis of data collected in this study. Results of the language screening did not necessarily predict the extent of success attained by the children on the narrative task. Some children who received low scores on the language screening performed well on the narrative task, generating a more structured story than their peers. The opposite of this is also apparent; some children with high scores on the language screening created narratives that were less complex and complete than other children’s narratives who may have received a lower score on the screening. With the exception of the two outliers from the urban charter and urban public schools,
all of the children participating in the narrative task demonstrated the capability to attain the academic performance standards for their grade.

In their narratives, children from poverty tended to use more conjunctions than the children from the middle class. Using more advanced conjunctions (e.g. “so”, “but”) in a narrative helped to enhance the experience for the listener by establishing the relationship between different thoughts in the story.

Children from the middle class tended to use more diverse vocabulary, as evidenced by a consistently higher TTR, than the children from poverty. Use of internal responses among all 18 narratives was scarce, limiting the conclusions to be drawn from this aspect of story structure. Finally, children from the urban public school performed, overall, more poorly on the language screening compared with the children from the suburban public and urban charter schools. The prediction was that the narratives generated by the children from the urban public school would be more poorly constructed than the narratives from the children at the other schools; however, the opposite trend was evident. Children from the urban public school generally produced more structured narratives than the children from the other schools who received higher language screening scores.

Limitations

As in all research studies, some limitations affected the results found in the current study. The sample size of this study is one limitation. From each school, 10-18 children participated, which is a small sample in comparison to the total number of students in each classroom. A larger sample of students, as well as the participation of more schools, would have allowed for more substantial conclusions to be made.
Time constraints were another limitation of this study. With more time allowed for data collection, all students participating in the language screening could have taken part in the narrative task, which would generate more data and allow for broader conclusions to be drawn, both within and across learning environments and social classes.

Another limitation of this study is the screening tool used to assess the language abilities of the participants. For the most part, results of the CELF-4 Screening did not necessarily predict performance on the narrative task. A different language screening tool may have been able to more accurately predict oral narrative performance.

**Implications for Future Research**

The majority of previous research on children’s narrative abilities has focused primarily on the differences between children with LD/LI and children who are typically developing on both story generation and story re-telling tasks. The few studies about children from different social classes have focused mostly on the overall language differences of children from the middle class and children from poverty. More studies involving children from poverty performing story generation tasks would be useful in conjunction with the current study to enhance the findings presented here. Also, researching the abilities of children from poverty to generate stories and re-tell stories would be helpful in drawing parallels between children from poverty and children with LD/LI. Additionally, researching different approaches to curriculum and their impact on the narrative abilities of children, as well as their impact on the attainment of performance standards, may provide interesting results in conjunction with the current study.


Dockrell, J. and Lindsay, G. (1998). The ways in which speech and language difficulties impact on children’s access to the curriculum. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 14*(2), 117-133.


APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

October 31, 2005

Meredith Hunter
140 Wadsworth Ave.
Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio 44221

Ms. Hunter:

The University of Akron's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) completed a review of the protocol entitled "Oral Narrative Differences of Children from Different Social Classes and Learning Environments". The IRB application number assigned to this project is 2005-1016.

The protocol qualified for Expedited Review and was approved on October 31, 2005. The protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for expedited review:

1. Collection of data through noninvasive procedures routinely employed in clinical practice

This approval is valid until October 31, 2006 or until modifications are proposed to the project protocol, whichever may occur first. In either instance, an Application for Continuing Review must be completed and submitted to the IRB.

Enclosed are the informed consent documents, which the IRB has approved for your use in this research. Copies of these documents must be submitted with any application for continuation of this project.

Please note that within one month of the expiration date of this approval, the IRB will forward an annual review reminder notice to you by e-mail, as a courtesy. Nevertheless, it is your responsibility as principal investigator to remember the renewal date of your protocol's review. Please submit your continuation application at least two weeks prior to the renewal date, to insure the IRB has sufficient time to complete the review.

Please retain this letter for your files. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, you must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Sharon McViehorter
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

CC: Department Chair
Kariyn Katz, Adviser
Phil Allen, IRB Chair

The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution.
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent or Guardian:

As part of my work toward a Master’s degree in the School of Speech-Language Pathology, I am conducting a study of elementary school students.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the oral narrative abilities of third graders from different schools. Please note that the responses of your child are appreciated and will add to the validity of the study.

Initial participation will take approximately 10-20 minutes. This will involve participating in a standard language screening test. Six children from your child’s class will be asked to participate in the second part of the study based on the scores shown by the screening test. The second part of the study will take approximately 10-20 additional minutes. Students participating in the second part of the study will be asked to tell me, the researcher, a story while looking at a single picture. The students will not be able to see me during this activity, which will encourage them to rely solely on oral language to tell their story. The second part of the study will be audio recorded for the purposes of transcription for the study.

Confidentiality of your child as the respondent of his/her responses will be protected throughout the study and publication. All identifying information will be coded so that your child’s name will not be used on any forms or recordings. All language screening forms and audio recordings will be kept in my possession until the study is finished (around April, 2006), at which time all records will be destroyed.

Following your consent, participation of your child in this study remains voluntary. Your child will also be asked for their permission to participate and they may refuse at any time during the study even if you consent. Participants can refrain from answering any or all questions without penalty or explanation.

If you or your child declines participation, there will be no consequences. You should be informed that the language screening and activity will be administered during
regular class hours. Beyond receiving a complimentary language screening, your child will not receive compensation for their participation in either part of the study.

If you have any questions or comments concerning this study, you can contact me (330-622-7937) or my faculty advisor, Dr. Karyn Katz (330-972-8679). This study was approved by The Institutional Review Board for The Protection of Human Subjects at The University of Akron. Questions or comments can also be directed to the Institutional Review Board. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Meredith Hunter                Karyn Katz, Ph.D.

I consent to this study and allow my child’s participation:

_____________________________   __________________________
Parent or Legal Guardian        Child’s Name
My name is Meredith. I am a student in the School of Speech-Language Pathology at The University of Akron. I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more about talking with third graders in different kinds of schools.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be answering some questions. After that, you may or may not be asked to tell a story to me about a picture I show you. This part will be audio taped for me to listen to later.

Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to participate. I will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study. Even if your parents say “yes”, you can still decide not to do this.

If you don’t want to do this study, you don’t have to participate. Remember, being in this study is up to you and no one will be upset if you don’t want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop.

You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have any questions later that you don’t think of now, let your teacher or principal know and they can get in touch with me.

Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form to keep.

______________________________  ______
Name of Subject     Age

______________________________  _______________
Signature       Date
APPENDIX D

TASK PICTURE

The Buried Treasure
APPENDIX E

TASK SCRIPT

For the CELF-4 Screening, a script is provided for administration to ensure that all participants are given exactly the same instructions. The instructions for the seven sections of the screening include:

For the first section, some pictures are shown to the child. The researcher says, “I’m going to show you some pictures and say some things about them. I want you to help me by finishing some of the things I say. Let’s try one. Here the bird is eating (point to the picture of the bird eating) and here the bird… (point to the picture of the bird flying and pause for child to finish the sentence).” Test items are given in the same way.

For the second section, the researcher shows some pictures to the child and says, “I’m going to say some words and show you some pictures. The words go together – they are related. Sock (point to the sock) and food (point to the foot). How do sock and foot go together?” Test items are given the same way.

For the third section, the researcher shows some pictures to the child and says “I’m going to say a direction and then point to some pictures. Point to the ball and the car (point to the ball and car). I pointed to them in the same order I said them. Now I will ask you to point to some pictures. I will say, ‘Go’ when I want you to point. Point to the fish and the apple. Go.” Test items are given the same way.
For the fourth section, the child is told, “I’m going to say a sentence. I want you to listen carefully and repeat exactly what I say. Let’s try. The class has a new student.” Test items are given the same way.

For the fifth section, the researcher says, “I’m going to read some words to you. Two of the words go together – they are related. Tell me the two words that go together best. Sock, house, shoe, napkin.” Once the child says the correct answer, the researcher then says, “How are sock and shoe related?” Test items are given the same way.

For the sixth section, the child is shown groups of words that can be made into sentences and the researcher says, “Here are some words that can be made into two different sentences: in the house, the dog, is. One sentence I can make using these words is, the dog is in the house. Now I want you to rearrange the words to make a different sentence. Use only these words.” Test items are given the same way.

For the seventh section, the child is shown four possible responses for each question, labeled A, B, C, and D. The researcher says, “I’m going to read you some problems to figure out. Each problem has two correct answers. Listen to the problem and choose the two correct answers.” Test items are given the same way.

Before administration of the oral narrative part of the study, students will be told, “What I’m going to ask you to do is sit across from me and I’ll put something between us so that we can’t see each other. Then I’ll give you a picture with a title and I want you to make up a whole story about the picture. The picture that I show you will just be one part of the story. Be as creative as you want to. Remember, I can’t see the picture, so you have to use your words to tell me the whole story. I’m going to record what you say, but nobody will know that this was your story. You already gave me your permission to be a
part of this activity, but if you feel like you don’t want to do this, you don’t have to. Just
let me know if you want to stop at any time. Do you want to do this?”

If the child says no, the researcher will say, “That’s fine, you can go back to your
class now. Thank you for helping me with my project.”

If the child says yes, the researcher will set up the barrier and say, “Okay, here’s
the picture and the title is The Buried Treasure. You can start your story whenever
you’re ready.” Once the story is over, the researcher will say, “Thank you so much for
helping me out. Your story was great and I really liked listening to it. You’re all finished
and you can go back to your class now.”
APPENDIX F

TRANSCRIPTS OF NARRATIVES

Narrative A01

Male, Low

Suburban Public School

Time: 29 seconds

Um, the guy, d- um, the guy digged, um, dug up a treasure in um, someplace and found uh the holy stuff uh, like jewels and everything. Okay, and um, then one golden cup.

That’s all I can think of about it.

Narrative A02

Female, Low

Suburban Public School

Time: 27 seconds

Child: Should I just say a story about it?

Researcher: Uh-huh.

Child: Okay. Once upon a time there was a bear that was looking for treasure. And then when he got off from his boat, he found, he digged, he got a shovel and digged, kept digging and diggin for hours and then she finally found some gold. The end.
Narrative A03
Female, Middle
Suburban Public School
Time: 1 minute, 37 seconds
There once was a story about a bear who was trying to find a treasure. So one day, he walked to the beach, and he brung his shovel too. He kept walking, so he started digging many holes. Each hole he couldn’t find, but he did build one hole, cause he, cause he thought he would give up after the last hole. But when he dug the last hole, he found a box. He opened it, and he found a, a cup, some beads and some golden coins. So then he brung the treasure, he walked home with the treasure box in his hand. He kept walking home, so he went home, he showed his kids and his, and his wife. And his wife said, “Wow! Where did you find this?” He said, “On the beach.” And so then they go back to the beach and they hide it behind the bush, they dig a hole, and they bury it. And so no one can find it, so whenever they need it, they can come and get it. So then they went home and they eat dinner and they go to bed. They wake up the next morning and they have breakfast. The end.

Narrative A04
Male, Middle
Suburban Public School
Time: 19 seconds
He goes to an island and, um, uses a metal detector and finds a treasure chest and digs it up and then he, um, finds all of this, um, treasure and then he sells it at a store.
Narrative A05

Female, High

Suburban Public School

Time: 1 minute, 48 seconds

Child: Can I um, say, like, okay. This picture is about a bear who is probably an explorer and he finds buried treasure and um, he’s gonna bring it back to his family when he gets back home and he’s going on a sandy beach. He was digging and digging for the lost treasure. Nobody can find it, except he finally found the buried treasure. Inside the treasure box were coins, valuable jewels, and valuable je- um, valuable silverware. He found it by digging a huge hole into the ground. The treasure chest is very old and it was buried a long time ago with this, it was buried a long time ago. The bear’s name was Peter Clark and he found the treasure. Nobody else had found the treasure before. He is a very good explorer. He usually wears a hat and he wears a tie around his neck. He, he wore jeans, a belt, and a sailor’s t-shirt. Um, the shovel he used was silver and made out of wood. Can I stop now?

Researcher: Whenever you want.

Child: Okay.

Narrative A06

Male, High

Suburban Public School

Time: 24 seconds
One day a bear was walking in, on the beach a-, with a metal detector, and he found, and he detected metal. So he started digging and digging and he finally hit something, and it was buried treasure. The end.

Narrative B01

Male, Low

Urban Charter School

First, first, uh first, uh first, uh first a bear was walking down the street. Uh, he saw, he saw a big lump, he, he he he saw a big lump of uh, uh a big lump of of ground and he a- a- and he touched it and then and then, and then he saw some gold, some some, some shiny gold, he saw some shiny gold lightening, some some shiny gold lighting under the ground and he and he and he s- and he shouted, “It’s treasure treasure.” So, so ran to get his shovel and then he digged it and digged it and digged it and digged it and digged it and then, and then he, and then he saw some treasure. He he was so glad that uh, that, that he bought, he, that that he bought the food. He bought lots and lots of food. He, he bought, he bought um, he bought, he bought cars, he he bought um, he bought, he bought uh, crops, he he bought crops to far- uh um the crops in his farm and then, and he bought uh, a farm wi- with animals. Uh, he bought uh, h-h-he he bought fans and, and and he bought, and he bought uh, and he bought phones t-t-to talk to people and then, and then next, and then next uh, his friend came to to get some treasure so, so so when he got his treasure, it was only one more, i-it was only in the was, i-it was only one coin, it was only, it was, one, one gold coin in there and, and then and then a-a-and then i-i-it only had two, it only had two friends a-and it was one coin, one golden coin in there.
And then, and then he said, he-he said he-he said, “How will” and then his friend said, “How we supposed to, to get, get one coin in the treasure?” An- and his friend said, “I don’t know. Just, just split it.” And his friend said if he split it, if he split it he would have nothing to buy with, so, so uh, so so so they looked for other treasure with their with the, with the detectors and then, and the and then he kept on doing it day after day after day after day after day and then, and then they found stuff to get in the ground an and they digged it up but it wasn’t, but it but it wasn’t the treasure. It was, it was a uh, it was it was it was a leather

*Time: first 3 minutes*

He found a bowling, he he he, he found a bowling trophy, a, a bowling trophy. He was, he was, said, he said, “Oh a bowling trophy!” And, and then, and then, and then have five golden coins in there, so they took, so they split it, three. The three. And it was, and there was f-, and there was f-, and there was like, five more. And then uh, i-it was five more that they found under the ground so they, so they put it in the, so they put it in the, uh, they put it in the uh, the treasure box, and the, and the- and they said, “Why will he put it in the treasure box?” So, so they put it in a popcorn bowl, and then, and then, and then they, and then, and then they spinned out the store. They spinned out the store, and then they, and then they

*Time: 4 minutes to 5 minutes*

And then uh then the teacher said, “Come tomorrow.” And then, and then the, and th- and then uh and then, then they came tomorrow, they came tomorrow and the- and they were, and they were, and they were so excited they teach, they teached, they teach the classes, but first Jack teached, first Jack teacheded uh, Jack teached the first grade.
Researcher: You need to finish it up, okay? Come to the end.

Child: Yeah. And then, and then and then Ja- and then Mike teached, and then Mike teacheded uh, the, the fifth grade, and then, and then Jake teacheded uh, high school and they lived happily ever after.

_Time: 8 minutes, 25 seconds to 9 minutes, 25 seconds_

_Narrative B02_

_Female, Low_

_Urban Charter School_

_Time: 1 minute, 27 seconds_

Once upon a time there was, there was a buried treasure under under under a sand on the on the island and and a bear came to, to um, unbury it and everybody all over the world was looking for the treasure and whoever found the treasure um, was going to um, to be to be um, famous out the world and and um, and once a bear, he came to the island and he, and he digged up and digged up day and night to find the treasure and um, and he um, and he found, and when he found the treasure then um, then he named it the buried treasure because um, um, it was um, buried deep under the ground. Um, um, and um, and uh, he he gave the gold to, to poor people for um, for um, for they, um, and so they can turn it into, t- to the city so they can have lot of money so, so they um can um, be in a house. That’s all.

_Narrative B03_

_Female, Middle_
“The Buried Treasure” is about a bear finding uh, bi- uh, tr- he was looking for a treasure box and he digged and digged until he could find the treasure box. Well, he digged so much that he could, he seen a brown box and it had treasure in it. Then, he was so happy that he wanted to take all of it, but he know that he couldn’t, so, mm, he just sat there and looked at it. And he was very happy that he found it, and, I don’t know.

Once upon a time there was a bear that digged up some treasure and he found a lot of great things and what he found was pearls, a cup, and many more things. Um, he he like, he he liked this all so much that he was very very proud and he was smiling and very happy. The end.
Um, there is a, um, bear and he, um, he was digging up lo- and looking for treasure and then he finally found the treasure and then he opened the treasure box and he saw all the jewelry in it.

Narrative B06
Male, High
Urban Charter School
Time: 1 minute, 2 seconds

Once upon a time, there, there was a boy named Sirajj. He was a miner. He looked for tr-, he looked for buried treasure for years and years and for the first time, he found, he found treasure but it was, didn’t what he was looking for. So he kept looking and looking and looking until he found what it was. It was, it was some toys that uh, he never, he never ever saw in stores so he couldn’t buy them. And then for the first time, he had found them. The end.

Narrative C01
Male, Low
Urban Public School
Time: 2 minutes, 2 seconds

“The Buried Treasure”. Once upon a time, there was a bear who who uh, buries treasure. One day, he went out, out um, of the ocean. He found a x. He digged, he had a shovel, he digged and dig. Then he found a trophy and some necklace in gold. He he he didn’t know what to do with it so he took it to this place called recycling and he got three
hundred and twenty five thou- thousand dollars. Then, then he spent it on his families and the bills, bills. He, then the, then he came back and there’s still the hole. But then the something voices singing. It was a, it was his little son. His little son said, his little son said he was digging for treasure and his dad, he said he said that he found already the treasure right there and then, then they went to, to home and he, he, and his son asked him, “How mu- What did you do with it?” He said, “To re- I recycle it.” He said, “Why did you recycle it?” “Because I get money.” And he got two thousand and fifty five thousand dollars, he said. And his son, his son took half a money and he had half a money. Then his son said, then his son said that he had, he he spent it on, on his bills, bills and, bills and food and clothes for, for school. The end.

Narrative C02
Male, Low
Urban Public School
Time: 32 seconds

Once upon a time, there was a bear who was walking in the woods. He found an x mark, so he had a, he went back to his club house and then he got a shovel and came back where he saw the x and digged where the x was at and he found treasure. The end.

Narrative C03
Female, Middle
Urban Public School
Time: 4 minutes
Child: (long pause)

Researcher: Do you understand what I want you to do?

Child: No.

Researcher: I just want you to make up a story about this picture. Do you think you can do that?

Child: Uh-huh. (long pause)

Researcher: Can you tell me what’s going on in the picture?

Child: A bear digged up box of treasure. (long pause)

Researcher: Anything else?

Child: He looked inside. (long pause) He found a um, necklace. (long pause)

Researcher: Do you want to say anything else about it, or are you finished?

Child: He found a trophy. (long pause)

Narrative C04

Male, Middle

Urban Public School

Time: 1 minute, 24 seconds

Child: On Tuesday a man, um, found a treasure. It had pearls, um, um, a cup, and that’s it. And he took it home and gave some of it away and, um, tried to find more. (long pause)

Researcher: Is that the end of your story?

Child: Mmm-hmmm.
One day, a bear who lived by the sea wanted to go pick up some treasures. But one day, he did go pick up the treasures but couldn’t find any, any. So he went to, to the beach where he lived and he started digging and he kept digging until he found a treasure and he pulled a treasure up from, from the ground and he found that so many gold stuff and so many clear he wanted to get some, but he, he didn’t think he could. So he went, he went to the beach and looked at the clouds until God and see if he could get it. But God didn’t answer. He wondered why and then he just figured out that when the sun is shining, he can get the gold, but when the rain is, when the rain is washing away the storm, he couldn’t get any. Do I have to write a whole story? Or can I-

Researcher: Um, if that’s the end, you can finish it.

Child: Yeah.

One day a bear was walking in the woods, when he felt something under his foot. He ran home and found a shovel and started digging and then he couldn’t find anything, so he found another place and started digging again. Then, he didn’t find anything again, so he
started digging at a different place. Then, he felt something but it wasn’t, it was just a boot. Then, he wouldn’t give up and kept digging in different spots. Finally, he found treasure and he was rich, after that. The end.