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The Development of Oral Narrative in First Nations Students

by

Angela Dawn Romaine

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Development of Oral Narrative in First Nations Students" submitted by Angela D. Romaine in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science.

Supervisor, Dr. Anne McKeough, Division of Applied Psychology

Co-Supervisor, Dr. Susan Graham, Department of Psychology

Dr. Michelle Drefs, Division of Applied Psychology

Dr. Annette LaGrange, Graduate Division of Educational Research

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Date

Abstract

Research has shown that early oral narrative is a precursor to literacy development. The rich oral tradition of First Nations make oral storytelling an ideal entry point into literacy experiences for their children. If educators are to capitalize on this, however, they need to have an understanding of young First Nations children's narrative competence, especially in light of the research that points to the many learning challenges faced by First Nations students. The purpose of this study was to investigate the development of First Nations students' storytelling and to examine associated underlying factors. Participants included 100 First Nations children aged 5 to 9 years. Assessments of story retelling, original storytelling, language, non-verbal intelligence, and positional concepts were undertaken. Statistical analyses included correlations, ANOVA and multiple regression. Results indicated that oral storytelling progressed developmentally, story recall exceeded storytelling, and oral narrative was related to language and age.

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We each have our own unique life story. We recount our personal stories as a way of organizing our experiences in time. These recollections serve as a tool to provide meaning to our experiences. Bruner (1990) suggested that we all have a predisposition to narrate. He held that without the skills to narrate, we could never endure the conflicts and contractions that we each experience in our social lives. Narrative allows individuals to create links between the ordinary and the exceptional and to find the intentional state responsible for deviations from cultural norms. In addition, it allows us to organize and make sense of experiences while reiterating the norms of society (Bruner, 1990).

The development of oral narrative has been widely researched in the North American populations. This research outlines the importance and development of oral narrative for language and literacy development, academic success, and social development (Nathanson, Crank, Saywitz, & Ruegg, 2007; Westby, Moore, & Roman, 2002). In comparison, research outlining the development of oral narrative in First Nations students is relatively limited (Wolfe, Schwartz, & Petersen, 1996). Thus, the goal of the present study was to investigate the development of oral narrative in First Nations students. In what follows, I will explore what oral narrative is, why it is important, and how it develops. I will conclude with a review of narrative in First Nations contexts.

What is Oral Narrative?

Simply stated, oral narrative refers to the ability to tell oral stories aloud. These stories typically begin as the statement of an event or a series of events. Bruner (1990) described oral

narrative as consisting of a number of properties. Narrative is composed of a unique sequence of events, mental states, and other happenings involving characters. Each constituent does not have meaning on its own, but when placed together in a sequence, the meaning or plot is revealed. Another property described by Bruner involves its association to reality; narrative can be either real or imagined. Narrative specializes in creating a link between the exceptional world that is out of reach and the ordinary world in which we all exist. Narrative also possesses a dramatic quality. Stories must relate to what is morally valued and appropriate. Finally, Bruner described the dual landscape of narrative. According to Bruner, the landscape of action pertains to the states, actions and events that take place in the physical world, whereas, the landscape of consciousness pertains to what a person or character may know, think or feel about the actions and events in the physical world.

Additional narrative elements necessary to storytelling have been described by Paul and Hernandez (1996). These include the ability to sequence events; to create cohesive text through the use of linguistic markers (e.g., and, then, and, but) and precise vocabulary; to convey ideas without extra-linguistic support; to understand cause and affect relationships; and to structure narrative along the culturally specific story schema to aid in comprehension.

Why is Oral Narrative Important?

The emergence and development of oral narrative is important for a number of reasons. Rosen (1985) stated that narrative is a fundamental process of the human mind and Davis, Shanks, and Davis (2004) described the development of narrative skills as critical for the progress of all children. In what follows, research is reviewed that outlines the contribution of

narrative competence to children's language and literacy development, academic success, and social interactions (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Bloome et al., 2003, and Garnett, 1986).

Language and Literacy Development

Narrative provides opportunities for children to develop a more sophisticated level of language before they become readers (Stadler & Ward, 2005). This higher level of language serves as an important role in the intellectual and emotional development of children (Riley & Burrell, 2007). Since narrative is prominent throughout human culture, art and education, it is no surprise that stories are integral to a range of cognitive, psychological, and social processes (McKeough & Genereux, 2003). Westby (1989) determined that narrative skills form a bridge between oral language and literacy by providing examples of extended and cohesive discourse that children often encounter in written texts.

Academic Success

In addition to aiding in language development, researchers have found that narrative competence is one of the best predictors of school success and academic outcome (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Feagans & Appelbaum, 1986). Specifically, researchers have demonstrated that oral narrative is important for academic success (Bloome, Katz, & Champion, 2003) because it helps children by providing them with information as well as building their listening comprehension skills through summarizing and paraphrasing. Additionally, oral narrative aids in the production of extended discourse, reports, explanations, and story retellings. Narratives are also important for academic success because they are often used as a vehicle for assessing children's knowledge and ability (Bloome et al., 2003).

Social Development

With regards to social development, research has shown that narrative is necessary for a range of common activities (e.g., comparing experiences, conversation, recalling events) that aid humans in connecting and communicating with each other. People narrate as a way of coming to know others and sharing information about themselves and their experiences (Garnett, 1986). In sum, oral narrative is an essential skill that affects several facets our lives, including language development, academic success, and socialization.

How Does Oral Narrative Develop?

The development of oral narrative is a complicated process that involves individual attributes as well as parental, community, and cultural influences. The unique interplay of these factors contributes to oral narrative development.

Individual Attributes

Language. Because language is fundamental to narrative, one of the most important processes that fosters narrative competence is the ability to develop language, including vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Our vocabulary is comprised of the words we use to effectively communicate. The vocabulary of a 4-year-old is mostly comprised of oral words and grows with age, experience, and exposure to words. At age four, children typically learn approximately 860 root words per year (Biemiller & Slonin, 2001). A number of factors have been linked to a strong vocabulary. These include exposure to print, such as storybooks; joint book reading; visits to the library and the number of storybooks in the home. (McGregor, 2004)

In addition to vocabulary, sentence syntax is also vital in promoting narrative skills. Sentence syntax refers to the positioning of verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc. in a sentence. Young children are typically able to construct simple sentences with correct syntax. These sentences usually follow a subject-verb-object pattern, which is one clause. As children are exposed to language they begin to use connectives such as then, so, and but, to join sentences and phrases. The use of conjunctives make sentences longer, more elaborate, and complex (Berk, 2003). The development of more sophisticated syntax adds interest and depth to children's' stories.

Theory of Mind. Understanding the link between what is in peoples' minds and their action is a second capacity that is fundamental to the development of oral narrative. According to Astington (2000), "children's theory of mind underlies their ability to attribute beliefs, desires, intentions, and emotions to the self and others in order to explain and predict behavior" (pp.270). In other words, theory of mind refers to children's beliefs about the contents of their mind, and the mind of others and how it motivates their actions. Research has shown that the development of theory of mind begins during infancy through joint attention and shared reference. By 18 months, children clearly show an understanding of a person's attentional focus and referential intent. Theory of mind continues to develop through the toddler years as children begin to understand emotion, desire and perception. Finally, by the age of 5, children begin to understand that emotions, desires and beliefs are not universal and that people hold different views of the world that may not be the same as their own. Thus, their developing theory of mind allows children to take different perspectives when telling or re-telling a story (e.g., the big bad wolf wanted to eat the little pigs and so he tried to huff and puff their house down but the little pigs didn't want to get eaten up and so they ran to the brick house).

Memory. Researchers have proposed that two types of memory are crucial in the development of narrative competence. These include autobiographical memory and working memory. Nelson and Fivish (2004) defined autobiographical memory as memory for the story of one's life or the explicit memory for an event that occurred in a specific time and place in one's personal past. There is much debate about when autobiographical memory emerges. Nelson and Fivish (2004) held that the memories of two-year-olds were not well enough embedded in personal meaningfulness to be called autobiographical. However, by the time children are about 3-years-old, their memories are clearly becoming autobiographical and by the age of 4, they can typically distinguish their own stories from others. This form of memory continues to emerge gradually over the preschool years. Autobiographical memory is important for oral narrative because it provides children with their personal life story. These early memories often serve as children's material for some of their first narratives. Essentially, autobiographical memory provides substance for stories (Nelson & Fivish, 2004).

Another form of memory, working memory, has also been found to be important for oral narrative development. Working memory refers to the ability to hold information in short term memory while performing a mental manipulation on it (Case, 1985). According to Siegler (1991), working memory is directly related to learning and development in all areas. If children are unable to hold information in memory and relate it to what is already known, then their ability to learn and develop will be impaired. McKeough (1992) examined the development of working memory in 4- and 6-year-olds by examining the number of simple familiar words that a child can hold in memory and report the opposite (e.g., big, up). This age-related growth in working memory was found to be correlated with an increase in oral story length and complexity (i.e., a movement from social scripts to plots that included a problem and its resolution).

Thought Structures. Thought structures related to oral narrative development include casual and temporal reasoning as well as schema development. Causal and temporal reasoning refer to the ability to understand causation and time. Conjunctives such as 'and', 'then', and 'but' are central to expressing causal and temporal relations. McKeough et al. (2005) found that 4-year-olds typically use simple additive and temporal conjunctives in their oral stories; however, they can be taught to purposefully use causal connectives such as *because, but*, and *so*. The use of causal connectives is an important skill for children to master, as it allows for coherent stories and the use of the adversative *but* allows children to compose stories with complicating events (e.g., *"They were on their way to their dad's work but they didn't know where it was")* (McKeough et al., 2005). Developmentally, additive and temporal conjunctives are first used, followed by causal and adversative conjunctives.

Story schemata have long been seen as central to the development of oral narrative competence in children. According to Duchan (2006) a schema is an abstract, complex, ever-changing conceptual structure. Researchers have proposed that by the age of 4, average functioning children have constructed a basic story schema, which is shaped by exposure to storybooks and oral narratives told within the family context (for further discussion, see subsequent section on parental influences). Within the mainstream Western European context, this story schema typically involves a number of components including setting, initiating event, response to event and conclusion. Schemata aid children in interpreting and remembering experiences and aid them in predicting what will happen next in familiar situations (Nelson, 1986). They also support children's retelling of storybook stories as well as original stories. Merritt and Liles (1989) examined both forms of narrative, retelling and original storytelling, and found that both are effective measures of narrative ability and that they both activate a cognitive

organization that is consistent with story schema. Stalnaker and Creaghead (1982) obtained three different forms of language samples including a retelling, an original generation and answering questions on the same topic as the stories. Results revealed that retelling a story produces the largest mean length of utterances over both tasks. Similarly, Merritt and Liles (1987) found that language impaired students' original narratives contained fewer complete episodes and were shorter with less use of story grammar than their retold narratives.

Parental Influences

In addition to individual attributes, a number of parental attributes aid in the development of oral narrative. These include style of parental talk, response to gender, and exposure to storybooks.

Parental Conversation Style. Research has examined the way parents reminisce about past events with their children and has determined that parent-child conversational exchanges are fostered through elaboration and questioning (Peterson, Jesso, & McCabe, 1999; Stadler & Ward, 2005). Yet not all parents engage in such exchanges. Leichtman, Wang, and Pillemer, (2003) identified two markedly different conversational styles used by mothers to talk about past events: high-elaborative vs. low-elaborative. High-elaborative mothers speak frequently with their children about the past, provide descriptive information and prompt children to provide similar narratives. Alternatively, low-elaborative mothers talk relatively less about past events and provide fewer details (Leichtman, Wang, & Pillemer, 2003). In contrast to low-elaborative parental conversation, which fosters mainly the retention of isolated facts, high-elaborative parents additionally help their children integration events and link information coherently, thus fostering the development of their children's storytelling skills.

Response to Gender. Another factor that influences a parents' style of talk is gender. Fivish and Haden (2003) have shown that parents communicate with their children in a stereotypically gendered fashion. This gender-specific form of communication can aid children in their understanding of culturally appropriate gender roles. Research has found that Caucasian Americans tend to be more elaborative with their daughters over their sons. This leads to girls providing longer more detailed accounts of past events. Additionally, research has found that parents tend to elaborate more on emotion with their daughters over their sons. These differences were evident for children over the age of three (Fivish & Haden, 2003). Differences in the degree of affiliative talk versus autonomous talk have also been found to be influenced by gender. For example, girls' narrative tends to be affiliative focusing on people and relationships. In contrast, boys' narrative is more autonomous focusing the individual and their independent actions (Fivish & Haden, 2003).

Exposure to Storybooks. A final factor related to children's narrative development, according to Whitehurst and Lonigan (2001), is storybook reading. Through repeated exposure to storybooks children begin to learn the essential features of narrative. These factors include things such as narrative diachronicity, particularity, intentional state entailment, and canonicity and breach (Bruner, 1990). In addition, researchers found that reading storybooks to children between the ages of 3 and 5 can aid them in using more complex vocabulary and sentence syntax in their oral discourse (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lowrance, 2004). Storybook reading also positively affects the development of reading skills throughout the school years (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001).

Oral storybook reading also occurs in the school setting, especially in the early grades where story time is a typical feature of the school day. This practice plays an important role in cultivating and supporting the development of oral narrative as it offers children cultural prototypes of what makes for a good story and how stories are structured and told. Other school activities such as show-and-tell and sharing time also support the development of oral narrative competence (Dickinson, McCabe, & Anastasopoulos, 2002; Peterson, Jesso, & McCabe, 1999; Stadler & Ward, 2005).

Cultural Influences

The broader culture in which children live has also been shown to exert influences on the development or oral narrative. Specifically, researchers have determined that differences in parent-child narrative conversations exist across cultures. These differences in narrative talk effect the function served by narrative cross-culturally (Wang, 2004; Westby, Moore, & Roman, 2002). Wang (2004) determined that Aboriginal mothers in New Zealand engaged in storytelling with their 3-year-olds about significant events of their culture and of their child's life. They value the transfer of stories within their culture. Additionally, Taiwanese narratives are used to teach moral lessons about future behavior (Wang, 2001). In contrast, Japanese parents engage in fewer narrative conversations and do not contribute information or introduce their own topics, but rather confirm information. Information usually emphasizes the child's social network and roles. They value the ability to infer intentions and discourage excess talk about oneself. Lastly, American mothers seldom use narrative in directive ways, but rather for entertainment purposes.

Additionally, narratives in the form of conversations about children's memories are used differently across cultures. In some cases conversations are used to foster independence and in

others to foster interdependence. To foster individuality, Canadian and European American mothers initiate lengthy memory conversations about events that are of particular interest to the child, and the child is viewed as the central character (Wang, 2001). Moreover, they focus on emotional aspects of the event, exploring the reasons for an emotional reaction. Alternatively, Chinese parents tend to portray the child as an interdependent being by emphasizing their group activities and relationships. They tend to criticize emotional responses and, instead, emphasize the child's proper behavior and maintenance of relationships (Wang, 2001). As such, cultural morals and values shape the type of narrative experience children have and thus, in turn, influence the type of narratives they tell, how they remember events, and how they view themselves relative to others.

Narrative in First Nations Contexts

Given that First Nations peoples view their culture as falling toward the interdependent end of the spectrum, we would expect their models of narratives to differ from those of mainstream Canadian culture, which falls on the independent end of the spectrum. Moreover, First Nations peoples have experienced a forced loss of culture and language that has impacted their lives both in and out of school (Adelson, 2008). Therefore, it is important to examine the differences and uniqueness that exist in the narrative performance of children from the First Nations community (Gutierrez-Clellen & Quinn, 1993; Westby, Moore, & Roman, 2002). In the following sections, I first provide brief historical background on First Nations peoples' cultural experience and its relation to the learning challenges their children experience. Second, I examine several specific features of First Nations narrative that differ from that of mainstream North American narrative, including its macrostructure and microstructure, the interactional

styles that exist within First Nations contexts, and the use of paralinguistic conventions in First Nations narrative.

Historical Experience and Current Learning Challenges

Historically, many First Nations individuals have been exposed to the devastating effects of colonial policies (Adelson, 2008). Many were told what constitutes appropriate dress, actions, beliefs, habits, and language, and were penalized for practicing and speaking in their own ways. Specifically, the policies and practices carried out through the residential schools imposed the belief that the languages used by First Nations students were inferior and that their culture was substandard and primitive. These unfortunate incidents have had an enduring influence on the language and culture of the First Nations people. Without a strong foundational knowledge of their native tongue, the parents of First Nations children have a more difficult time sharing their language with their children and teaching them about their culture. Thus, these practices contributed to low language and literacy development among generations of First Nations children as well as limited educational and occupational opportunities (Adelson, 2008; Gutierrez-Clellen & Quinn, 1993). Moreover, research suggests that many parents who are survivors of residential schools may not be comfortable participating in the same sorts of role-play and socialization that is often emphasized in typical Western language and literacy programs (Ball, 2008).

Research has also shown that a number of social risk factors have an effect on children's early language development, learning, and school performance (Lucchese & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007). These social risk factors include chronic poverty, low parental education and minority status. These factors, in turn, have an effect on several of the attributes that contribute to the

development of oral narrative such as their language development, academic achievement, and social well being. Unfortunately many members of the First Nations community fall victim to several of these social risk factors.

There is strong consensus that low levels of speech, language, and literacy development can lead to difficulties with school success, employment, financial security, and social exclusion (Ball, 2008). Unfortunately, language differences among First Nations children are often misinterpreted as deficits or difficulties. Thus, it is important for researchers and practitioners to be aware of individual, cultural and contextual factors that may influence the development of language and the assessment of narrative performance (Gutierrez-Clellen & Quinn, 1993).

Features of First Nations Narrative

An important step in gaining sensitivity to the unique features of First Nations children oral narrative development is to understand the organizational structure of the narratives told within First Nations communities. Stories consist of a macrostructure (i.e., the story's overall organization and thematic content and microstructure (i.e., the words and syntactic structures used in the story). Each of these structures is discussed in what follows.

Macrostructure of Narrative. In mainstream western culture, stories typically follow a strict formula involving a setting, which specifies time, place and characters, a problem, and its resolution (Westby, Moore, & Roman, 2002). Additionally, these stories include a good deal of information and detail, which is added to create a more elaborate and complex story (Westby et al., 2002). In contrast, First Nations narratives typically jump into the story without providing

background information. Brief narratives that tend to elicit less language are typically valued over lengthy and detailed narratives.

First Nations individuals also structure their narratives differently than do those speaking a Standard English dialect (Ball & Bernhardt, 2005). For example, a typical Standard English narrative structure is chronologically sequenced with explicit connection between ideas. Elaboration and detail are valued. In contrast, First Nations narrative structure often uses thematic sequencing where one idea is followed by several other ideas. Typically, connections between ideas are implicit rather than explicit. Some First Nations members feel that there is no need to use cohesive ties across topic changes because there is an implicit commonality across subjects that binds them together. Because story plots in First Nations narrative do not flow in a linear manner with clear temporal and causal relationships, Western readers/listeners experience a lack of organization and cohesion (Westby et al., 2002). Additionally, First Nations portray a different view of time, space and motion than do narratives from Western cultures (Westby et al., 2002).

With regards to story theme, research has shown that a number of culturally universal narrative themes exist, including villainy, lack or loss of something, and trickery (Westby, Moore, & Roman, 2002). However, these themes often play out differently depending upon cultural values. For example, in Western cultures the story of a returning son brings a happy ending with power, honor, respect and material possessions for the individual. In contrast, a Native American story of a returning son results in harmony and happiness for all people within the community, not just the individual.

Microstructure of Narrative. Narrative microstructure refers to the words and syntactic structures used in a story. Studies have shown that differences in microstructure, including sentence structure and the use of conjunctives (i.e., connecting words), gender specific pronouns, and vocabulary, exist in narratives across cultures (Westby, Moore, & Roman, 2002). It is argued that differences in exposure to English dialects account for differences in narrative microstructure.

When people tell stories, a number of characteristics from their native language influence the way stories are told (Westby et al., 2002). For example, one study found that the subject-object-verb sentence structure is commonly utilized in Native American narrative, which contrasts with the subject-verb-object sentence structure used in mainstream stories. Additionally, conjunctives are typically limited to temporal or causal relations (e.g., and, then, because and so) with very limited use of adversatives (e.g., but, though). Gender specific pronouns are typically not used; rather "he" and "she" were replaced with the word "it"; (Gutierrez-Clellen & Quinn, 1993). In a study where students were asked to recall a story about a frog going to a restaurant, many students were unsuccessful in labeling the restaurant and did not show evidence of understanding what a restaurant script entailed (Gutierrez-Clellen et al., 1993). Obviously, this can lead to difficulty when children attempt to interpret and comprehend stories. Exposure to different English dialects can account for differences in narrative microstructure. Research has shown that First Nations children are exposed to a non-standard dialect of English as their primary language. Children who have not acquired the Standard English dialect before entering school are often viewed as having poor language skills, language impairments, or other pervasive developmental delays (Ball & Bernhardt, 2005). However, although this dialect is

different than the Standard English dialect, it is important to note that it is not an inferior version of a language. Therefore, it is important to be mindful of the differences.

Dialects have a complete grammatical rule system which governs pronunciation, word-formation, and how words are combined into sentences. First Nations' dialect has a number of unique features that set it apart from the Standard English dialect. First, speech sounds may differ between First Nations and Standard English dialect. For example, the sound *d* may be used in places that use *th* (i.e., that versus dat, other versus odder). Another unique feature of many First Nations dialects is a verb/noun inflection. Some dialects may use the same form for all present tense verbs (i.e., I go, you go, he go). In some First Nations dialects, pronouns are optional, especially when they can be inferred based on context (i.e., You hear about Mike? Drives into town yesterday). Lastly, many of the assessment measures used in schools are based on words that are familiar to speakers of the Standard English dialect, but not to First Nations individuals in remote or rural communities (Ball & Bernhardt, 2005). For example, one measure required students to provide the labels or names for certain pictures. In some cases there were items that refer to specific religious structures or other objects that First Nations students may have limited exposure to. All of these differences are important to be aware of before assessing and diagnosing First Nations children and their language development and narrative production. These differences, if not acknowledged, can lead to an inaccurate assessment of children's abilities.

Interactional Styles. Another unique feature that impacts on the development of First Nations children's oral narrative is the interactional styles that exist within the community. Families socialize children to learn the form and functions of language that will help them

achieve self-identity. Research has shown that families from low socioeconomic backgrounds (and First Nations communities) tend to engage in less book reading and language games and have less access to books, toys, and educational material (Lucchese & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007). Moreover, in some cultures, storytelling is a social event where stories are often told in a joint storytelling manner. Narrative is produced cooperatively with the audience in a conversational fashion (Gutierrez-Clellen & Quinn, 1993). For members of the First Nation community, stories are told for reasons different from mainstream society, and are typically told by Elders (Westby, Moore, & Roman, 2002). In mainstream society, children are encouraged to listen to and tell stories. Children are also sometimes expected to perform stories in front of others. In contrast, members of the First Nations community typically reserve public storytelling for adults and Elders. Additionally, the purpose of storytelling varies across cultures. It may be used to entertain, teach, display knowledge and skills, and to plan and warn. Contrary to children from a mainstream educational setting, many First Nations children have little experience with recounting events before entering the school system and the imaginative stories that they hear are more often told to teach rather than to entertain (Westby et al., 2002). In other words, stories are told for a different purpose. The idea of telling stories for the sake of entertainment is unfamiliar to First Nations children. Lastly, parents of First Nations children do not scaffold them in learning to tell stories and do not expect them to demonstrate their knowledge through storytelling, a common strategy employed on Western society (Westby et al., 2002).

Paralinguistic Strategies. A final cultural difference in narrative performance that shapes the development of oral narrative in First Nations children involves paralinguistic strategies. Some paralinguistic behaviors include repetition of sounds, words, and phrases; changes in rate, loudness, stress, and pitch; false starts; and variations in pauses. These strategies may be used to

signal focus, perspective, emphasis, and to signal different parts of stories. For example, in mainstream culture, stories typically begin without many false starts, and emphasis is put on parts of speech to indicate suspense or to add a dramatic flair. In addition, stories in mainstream society have very short pauses between statements and their rate of speech is typically constant. In contrast, the stories told by First Nations students tended have several false starts and lengthy pauses between statements. Phrases and words were often repeated and their overall volume of speech was quite low (Ball & Bernhardt, 2005).

A great deal of research exists outlining the individual, parental and cultural influences that play of role in the development of oral narrative. Individual attributes such as language, memory, theory of mind, and thought structures are all crucial to the development of oral narrative (Peterson, 2008). Research has also shown how culture affects parental style of talk (Wang, 2004) which in turn plays a part in the development of individual attributes. An understanding of the influences that aid in narrative development is important as oral narrative is a predictor of language and literacy development (Stadler & Ward, 2005), academic success (Bloome, Katz, & Champion, 2003), and social development (Garnett, 1986). These influences have been widely researched in Western populations; however, not as extensively in First Nations contexts, although research exists to show that narrative function and structure differs in First Nations and Western European traditions. Nevertheless, First Nations children "walk in two worlds" – that of First Nations people and main stream society (Stan Bird, personal communication, February 19th, 2009) and, as such, need to be profit from language and literacy experiences available to mainstream children. Stoney Nakoda Elders desire that their children have the tools to thrive in 21st century society so that they will have equal professional opportunity and equal economic prosperity (Clarice Kootenay, personal communication,

February 20th, 2009). By evaluating First Nations students' stories with a Western scoring schema, we attempted to understand how the children can succeed in a society that is guided by Western beliefs and values. Through the awareness of these students' strengths and needs we can aid them in achieving success and prepare them for the future (Clarice Kootenay, personal communication, February 20th, 2009).

The Present Study

The purpose of the present study was to examine the oral narrative skills of early school-age First Nations children. To assess these skills in First Nations students, children were presented with a number of measures to assess language, knowledge of positional concepts, and non-verbal intelligence. They were also asked to listen to a tape recorded story, retell the story, and then create a story of their own. Both the retold story and the original story were transcribed and then divided into terminal units (t-units). A t-unit is the shortest grammatically complete sentence in a passage or story that can be cut out without creating fragments. Hunt (1977) described a t-unit as "a single clause plus whatever subordinate or non-clauses are attached to, or embedded within, the main clause" (pp. 92-93). After the retold and original stories were broken into t-units, they were scored using the McKeough Oral Narrative Evaluation Rubric (see Appendix A) and developmental level was selected using the coding scheme depicted in Figure 1.0. Examples that illustrate the coding scheme are provided in Appendix B.

Three key research questions were considered. The first question was whether oral narrative in our sample progressed in a developmental fashion. That is, did the retold and original stories begin with a simple event sequence and progress on to include a problem, a

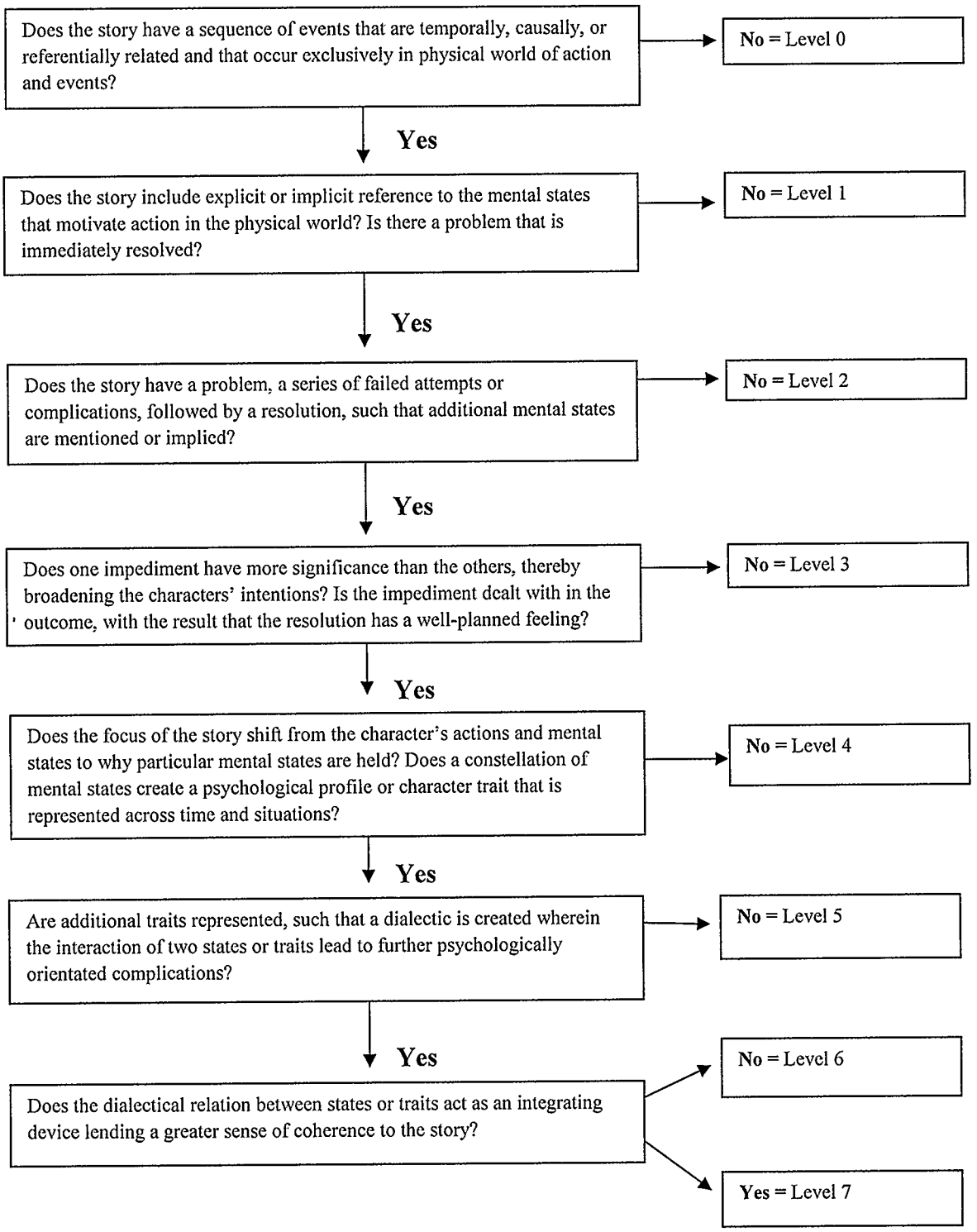

Figure 1.0 McKeough (1992) Developmental Levels

resolution, a complicating event and so forth? It was predicted that oral narrative of First Nations students would progress in a developmental fashion. Secondly, I examined students' ability to recall stories versus their ability to compose an original story. It was predicted that student's ability to recall stories would be better than their ability to compose an original story, as measured by the length (number of t-units) and complexity (i.e., developmental story level) of the story. Finally, I examined the contribution of a number of factors, including age, language, and knowledge of positional concepts, in terms of their relationship to the development of oral narrative.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were recruited from the Stoney Nakoda nation. The sample consisted of 100 First Nations students in kindergarten, grade one and grade two ($M = 6.63$, SD = 0.88, range = 5.08 - 9.25) who attended two schools in Western Canada. One school was located on the reserve whereas the second was located in a nearby hamlet. See Table 1 for mean ages and gender distribution across grades.

Measures & Scoring

Five measures were individually administered to each participant, including two measures of narrative development, one measure of non-verbal intelligence, one measure of language expression, and one measure of knowledge of positional concepts. This battery of tests was chosen as the literature showed that these measures were relevant indicators of oral narrative development.

Table 1

Mean ages (with standard deviation and range) and gender distribution across grades

Grade	*n*	Gender	*Mean* Age[a]	SD	Range
Kindergarten	33	Boys = 19 Girls = 14	5.70	0.34	5.08 – 6.67
Grade One	46	Boys = 20 Girls = 26	6.74	0.36	6.16 – 7.83
Grade Two	21	Boys = 10 Girls = 11	7.88	0.53	7.25 – 9.25

[a] = Age presented in years

Narrative Measures and Scoring Methods. Two measures of narrative development were included. One measure of narrative retelling ability was gathered through the Strong Narrative Assessment Procedure (SNAP; Strong, 1998). The SNAP involved the use of a tape recorded story that accompanied a wordless picture book, *"Frog, Where Are You?"* (Mayer, 1969). Each child listened to the tape recording while following along with the storybook. During this period, the researcher was out of the room. Once the story was finished, the researcher returned to the room and asked the child to retell that story as completely as they could. This story recall was recorded for later transcription. Once the story was retold, each child was asked ten questions based on factual and inferential knowledge of the story (see Appendix C). A second measure of narrative development was collected using McKeough Storytelling Prompt (MSP). Each child was asked to tell a story about a little girl/boy (depending upon the child's gender) and a horse. Children were given as long as they needed to tell a story.

After the retold and original stories were broken into t-units to determine story length, they were then scored using the McKeough Oral Narrative Rubric and assigned then a developmental level (See Figure 1.0). These two tools provided a measure for story complexity.

For reliability purposes, two coders independently scored 15% of the recalled and original stories. Intraclass correlations, absolute type with raters random, for the t-units in the recalled story were .99 ($p < .001$) and for the original story were .98 ($p < .001$). In addition, interrater reliability was calculated for levels of recalled stories (Cohen's Kappa = .79, $p < .001$) and for original stories (Cohen's Kappa = .90, $p < .001$). All interrater reliability scores were above the acceptable range.

Test of Early Language Development - Third Edition (TELD- 3). A measure of expressive and receptive language was obtained using the TELD-3 (Hresko, Reid, & Hammill, 1999). The TELD-3 is a 75-item standardized measure. To illustrate, expressive language was measured by asking the child to repeat sentences exactly as they were heard. An example of a receptive language item would require the child to view a page with different pictures and to point to specific items when prompted. The TELD-3 takes between 15 and 40 minutes to administer depending upon the age of the child. Student responses on the receptive and expressive subtests were scored as stipulated in the TELD-3 manual. The TELD-3 receptive, expressive and spoken language composites (total score) have respectable alpha levels ranging from .91 to .95 on average, and test-retest scores of a strong reliability over a two week period, ranging from .85 to .94 (see Hresko et al., 1999 for details). Participants' mean scores as a function of grade are presented in Table 2.

Boehm Test of Basic Concepts - Third Edition (Boehm-3). A measure of knowledge of concepts related to positions including space, time and quantity was obtained using the Boehm-3 (Boehm, 2001). The Boehm Test of Basic Concepts is a 50-item test. Children are asked to look at a group of pictures in boxes and then circle the box that describes what was asked of them (e.g., Circle the child who is first in line, or circle the glass with the least juice.) The Boehm takes approximately 30 minutes to administer. Student responses on the Boehm-3 were scored as stipulated in the manual. Boehm (2001) reports internal consistency correlations from .82 to .90 for kindergarten, first and second grade students. Participants' mean percentile scores as a function of grade are presented in Table 2.

Test of Nonverbal Intelligence – Third Edition (TONI-3). The TONI-3 (Brown, Sherbenou & Johnsen, 1997) is a standardized test of nonverbal intelligence that consists of 50

Table 2

Mean standard scores (TELD – 3 and TONI -2) and percentile ranks (Boehm-3) and standard deviations as a function of grade

Measure	Grade	*Mean*	SD
TELD Expressive Quotient	Kindergarten	81.30	9.19
	Grade One	84.35	8.78
	Grade Two	84.07	10.13
TELD Receptive Quotient	Kindergarten	84.48	12.17
	Grade One	91.13	8.78
	Grade Two	92.00	6.25
TELD Spoken Language Quotients	Kindergarten	79.39	11.84
	Grade One	85.12	9.20
	Grade Two	85.69	8.37
n = 92			
Boehm – 3 Percentile Rank	Kindergarten	6.16	7.98
	Grade One	7.46	10.98
	Grade Two	6.95	13.08
n = 98			
TONI – 3 Quotients	Kindergarten	101.10	11.54
	Grade One	93.63	9.70
	Grade Two	91.14	8.66
n = 96			

items. More specifically, it measures intelligence, aptitude, abstract reasoning, and problem solving. The test requires no reading, writing or speaking on the part of the child. It is completely nonverbal and largely motor-free, requiring only a point, nod, or symbolic gesture to indicate response choices. The TONI – 3 measures a specific component of intelligent behavior by testing an individual's ability to solve problems without overtly using language. The child is shown a picture book where each page shows different patterns. Instructions are pantomimed and the child is shown that they are to select the picture that constitutes the pattern. The TONI-3 takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes, depending upon the age of the child. Student responses were scored as stipulated in the manual. Brown and colleagues (1977) report coefficient alphas ranging from .89 to .97. Participants' mean standard scores as a function of grade are presented in Table 2.

Procedure

Recruitment of participants took place over two phases. The initial phase involved distribution of a letter describing the purpose of the study and requesting either consent or refusal to participate. These letters were sent home with students and then returned to classroom teachers. For those students who did not return their consent forms, a second phase of recruitment took place. This involved the efforts of two school staff members, one from each school site, who individually contacted the necessary families. Families were informed of the purpose of the study and informed consent to participate or not participate was collected. All parents who returned the consent forms, regardless of their participation status, were entered into a draw for a $100.00 gift certificate to a local restaurant. Two separate draws occurred, one for each site. In addition, all teachers and school staff involved in the project were entered into a

draw for a $100.00 gift certificate for the same restaurant. Again, a draw occurred for each research site. Each child in this study was administered the same battery of tests. Tests were administered in a random order with the exception of the story recall and original story compositions, which were administered back-to-back.

Children were tested on an individual basis in a quiet area of their school. Children were seated at a table directly across from the examiner. At the start of the testing session, children were told that were going to take part in a short task that involved either answering questions, listening to a story or circling items on a page. No feedback was given during any of the testing sessions. If children failed to respond or responded, "I don't know" they were encouraged to try their best. After each child completed a test, they were given a sticker as a token of appreciation for their participation. All data was stored in a secure location until scoring and transcription took place.

Results

Three sets of analyses were conducted to address three key questions. The first question was whether oral narrative progresses in a developmental fashion. The second question was whether a student's ability to recall stories would be better than their ability to compose an original story. Lastly, a number of factors such as age, language and knowledge of positional concepts were examined in terms of their relation to the development of oral narrative.

Developmental Change in Narrative

Descriptive statistics for complexity and length on both the story retelling and original storytelling measures are presented in Table 3. To determine if oral narrative progresses in a developmental fashion, Pearson bivariate correlations were calculated between age and length

Table 3

Means and standard deviations for Complexity and Length on Story Retelling and Storytelling Measures

	Mean (SD) for Story Retelling Complexity	Mean (SD) for Storytelling Complexity
Kindergarten (n = 17)	1.06 (.43)	.94 (.90)
Grade One (n = 31)	2.03 (.60)	1.71 (.74)
Grade Two (n = 16)	2.06 (.93)	2.13 (.94)
Total (n = 64)	1.78 (.42)	1.61 (.94)

n = 64

	Mean (SD) for Story Retelling Length	Mean (SD) for Storytelling Length
Kindergarten (n = 17)	8.64 (7.39)	7.65 (9.13)
Grade One (n = 31)	13.65 (9.05)	7.87 (6.47)
Grade Two (n = 16)	13.38 (11.62)	12.13 (11.94)
Total (n = 64)	12.25 (9.48)	8.88 (8.87)

n = 64

for the story retelling and the original storytelling. As well, correlations between age and complexity, as measured by developmental level, were calculated for story retelling and original storytelling. Similar correlations were conducted for grade across the two storytelling measures.

For story retelling, there was no significant correlation between length and age, ($r = .16$, $p > .17$). There was, however, a significant positive correlation between complexity and age for the story retelling ($r = .47, p < .01$). Similarly, for the original storytelling, length of the story was not significantly related to age, ($r = .14, p > .26$). However, complexity was positively correlated ($r = .38, p < .01$) with age for original storytelling. The correlational analysis between grade, length, and complexity for the two storytelling measures revealed that there was a significant positive correlation between grade and complexity for both story retelling ($r = .42, p < .01$) and original storytelling ($r = .47, p < .01$). No significant correlations were noted between grade and length for either story retelling or original storytelling, however. These results suggest that, in terms of story complexity, but not story length, older children outperform younger children in their ability to retell and tell original stories. In addition, it was found that that complexity of original story retelling and storytelling, but not length, increases with grade, as would be expected given the age results.

Story Retelling versus Storytelling

To determine if there was a significant difference between children in kindergarten, grades one and grade two on the two storytelling measures (i.e., story retelling and original storytelling) in terms of complexity, a 3 (grade) x 2 (task type, retell vs. original) mixed factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. There was no significant main effect of task type and no interaction between task and grade; however there was a significant main effect for grade,

such that the complexity of both story retelling and original storytelling increases with grade, $F(2, 61) = 18.24, p < .001, \eta^2 = .374$.

Post hoc tests, with Bonferroni correction, indicated that children in kindergarten produced stories at a significantly less complex developmental level than children in grade one ($p < .001$). There was no significant difference in complexity between the stories produced by children in the first and second grade ($p < .619$), however.

To determine if there was a significant difference between children in kindergarten, grades one, and grade two in story length, as a function of story-telling task, a second 3 (grade) x 2 (task type – retell vs. original) mixed factor ANOVA was conducted. There was a significant main effect for task such that story retelling was longer than storytelling, $F(1, 61) = 5.55, p < .022, \eta^2 = .083$; however there was no interaction between task and grade; nor was there a significant main effect for grade.

Factors Related to Narrative Complexity

A standard multiple regression was performed between story retelling complexity as the dependent variable and age, overall language ability (as measured by the TELD – 3), and knowledge of positional concepts (Boehm) as independent variables. Table 4 displays the correlations between the variables, the unstandardized regression coefficients (*B)* and intercept, the standardized regression coefficients (β), the semipartial correlations (sr_i^2), R^2, and adjusted R^2. R for regression was significantly different from zero, $F(3, 63) = 6.498, p < .001$, with R^2 at .236. The only independent variable that was a significant predictor was age. The adjusted R^2 value of .20 indicates that approximately 20% of the variability in storytelling can be accounted

Table 4

Standard Multiple Regression of Age, Oral Language, and Boehm on Story Retelling Complexity

Variables	Story Retelling Complexity (DV)	Age	Oral Language	Boehm	*B*	*β*	sr_i^2 (unique)
Age	.394				.386**	.37	.13
Oral Language	.327	.145			.017	.218	.03
Boehm	.206	-.041	.558		.010	.099	
					Intercept = -2.323		
Means	1.70	6.49	84.46	6.26			
Standard deviations	.76	.72	9.6	7.50			

$R^2 = 0.236$*
Adjusted $R^2 = .200$
$R = .486$

for by age. These results suggest that part of the differences in children's retold stories is due to their age.

A second standard multiple regression was performed between original storytelling complexity as the dependent variable and age, overall language ability, and knowledge of positional concepts (Boehm) as independent variables. Table 5 displays the correlations between the variables, the unstandardized regression coefficients (*B*) and intercept, the standardized regression coefficients β), the semipartial correlations (sr_i^2), R^2, and adjusted R^2. R for regression was significantly different from zero, $F(3, 56) = 7.141$, $p < .001$, with R^2 at .28. Two of the independent variables, age and overall language ability, were the only significant predictors. The adjusted R^2 value of .24 indicates that approximately 24% of the variability in storytelling can be accounted for by age and language ability. These results suggest some of the differences in children's original storytelling complexity are due to age and language ability.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the development of kindergarten, grade one, and grade two First Nations children's oral narrative development. Although it is clear that First Nations narrative prototypes differs markedly from those of Western European cultures, and hence from the mainstream North American prototype (Westby, Moore, & Roman, 2002), standard Western measures of narrative and associated competencies were used in the present study. This was because the aim of the present study was to determine First Nations children's narrative knowledge relative to the demands placed on them within the school system. This approach was taken with the consent and support of tribal Elders. Children's language ability and knowledge of positional concepts was assessed in relation to their age. Children then heard a

Table 5

Standard Multiple Regression of Age, Oral Language and Boehm on Original Storytelling Complexity

Variables	Storytelling Complexity (DV)	Age	Oral Language	Boehm	*B*	*β*	sr_i^2 (unique)
Age	.385				.416**	.34	.11
Oral Language	.378	.101			.041**	.42	.12
Boehm	.074	-.051	.542		-.016	-.13	
					Intercept = -4.581		
Means	1.55	6.57	84.80	6.18			
Standard deviations	.89	.72	8.99	7.68			

$R^2 = 0.277$*
Adjusted $R^2 = .238$
$R = .526$

*$p < .01$

story on tape and were asked to recall the story. Children were subsequently asked to share a story of their own. Results, which yielded three main insights into the development of oral narrative in First Nations students, will be discussed. The study's limitations will also be discussed and directions for future research will be outlined.

Interpretation of Findings

Developmental Change in Oral Narrative. The development of participants' oral narratives (i.e., story retelling and original story telling) were examined in terms of complexity, as measured by developmental level) and length (as measured by the number of t-units), across age and grade levels. The results of each analysis will be discussed in relation to the relevant research.

Story Complexity. The first finding was that there was a positive relationship between participants' age and the complexity of their stories, both recalled and original, with older children outperforming younger ones. In addition, results indicated that there was a positive relationship between grade and story complexity, both recalled and original, with children in higher grades outperforming those in the lower grades. These results are consistent with previous research. Applebee (1978) wrote extensively about age-related changes in the complexity of stories. Similarly, in their analysis of story high points and story grammar, Peterson and McCabe (1983) determine that the structure of oral narrative became increasingly complex over the early school age years. Results showed that 4-year-olds stories typically consisted of unsystematically related events. At the age of 5, children's stories begin to have a key point, but they lack resolution. By the time children reached the age of 6, their stories become an ordered sequence of events, which move from a high point to a resolution. In terms of story grammar, Peterson and

McCabe's (1983) results showed that complete episodes in stories do not become dominant until the around the age of 6. Before this time, children's narratives typically lacked motivating goals and relatedness. These results suggest that a developmental progression exists in narrative structure.

Similarly, McKeough (1992) established that with development an increase occurred in the complexity of Canadian (non-aboriginal) children's original oral stories. This shift was such that basic social scripts composed of simple action orientated event sequences were replaced with plots, composed of both actions and the mental states associated with them. This move toward what McKeough (1992) referred to as intentional narratives (i.e., where actions are motivated by characters' intentions or mental states) is consistent with Theory of Mind research (Astington, 2000), which has determined that between the ages of 4 and 6 years, children come to understand that individuals hold mental states and that these mental states motivate and determine their actions. Moreover, McKeough (1992) determined that changes in original story complexity correlated with growth in working memory.

Ravid and Berman (2006) examined the narrative information included in stories and found that the nature of narrative content changed as a function of age. Specifically, as children got older they began to include more interpretive information in their narratives. Lastly, Lynch and colleagues (2008) examined the development of narrative and narrative comprehension skills of young non-native children. Results found that as children got older their sensitivity to the structure and causal connections of narrative increased. Therefore, the current findings are consistent with existing analyses of developmental growth in the complexity of original oral narrative competence.

It should be noted, however, that the absolute levels of narrative complexity produced by the present First Nation sample were at a somewhat lower level than those of middle class non-aboriginal participants in previous studies (McKeough, 1992). However, because empirical analysis was not conducted, there is no evidence that the differences are significant ones. Nevertheless, this tentative observation is in keeping with research that has shown a lag in the performance of children who are culturally distinct or who live in poverty, as these children do not have the educational and social advantages of middle class children (Adelson, 2008).

Story Length. Unlike the prediction that story complexity would increase with age and grade, the prediction that story length would increase with age and grade was not supported. In the current study, correlations between story length, age, and grade were not significant for either story retelling or original storytelling. Contrary findings appear in the literature. To illustrate, Pitcher and Prelinger (1963) determined that story elements such as number of words, number of t-units, number of characters and number of incidents all show a steady increase with age. Similarly, when children were asked to retell a story that contained a setting, problem, complicating event, and resolution, which accounted for both the problem and complication, McKeough (1992) found that 4-year-olds recalled significantly fewer gist and detail t-units than 6-year-olds, who, in turn, recalled significantly fewer gist and detail t-units than 8-year-olds. The current finding that age and grade are not correlated with story length is difficult to interpret. Further study of story recall and original story telling is necessary to understand this phenomenon.

Story Retelling versus Storytelling. The comparison of story retelling to original storytelling involved examining the length and complexity of both types of stories, across grades. The results of each analysis will be discussed in relation to the relevant research.

Length. Analysis indicated that First Nations students' story retellings were longer than their original stories. This finding is consistent with existing research, which has demonstrated that story retelling is considered to be less cognitively demanding than an original storytelling because the story content and structure is provided. A number of previous studies have demonstrated this phenomenon. To illustrate, Stalnaker and Creaghead (1982) asked children to retell a story and to tell a story. She found that retelling a story produced the largest mean lengths of utterances. Morrow (1985) also examined narrative and found that retelling a story requires thinking about individual events and arranging these events in the correct sequential order. In contrast, telling a story requires actually generating individual events, thinking about those events and how they might combine to be meaningful and then arranging them in the proper sequential order. As the latter is more cognitively complex, retelling a story is less demanding than telling a story and thus performance is better (Morrow, 1985).

A second finding was that the length of story telling and retelling, as measured by the number of t-units, did not change with grade. This finding is not supported in the extant research (e.g., McKeough, 1992; Pitcher & Prelinger, 1963) and so requires further research.

Complexity. When differences in complexity between story retelling and original storytelling were examined, the results showed that there were differences across grades, such that grade one participants told more complex stories (retold and original) than kindergarten participants. This finding is supported in the literature (e.g., Peterson & McCabe 1983;

McKeough, 1992). In the current study, however, no differences were noted in story complexity (retold and original) between grade one and two participants. This finding was not predicted and needs to be investigated further.

A second finding was that no differences were noted in complexity between retelling and original storytelling. This finding is counter to extant research. To illustrate, McKeough (1992) observed that children's retellings of a story, which included a setting, problem, complicating event, and resolution that accounted for both the problem and complication, were structurally more complex than the original stories told by the children. This latter finding was accounted for in terms of the typically observed production versus reproduction differential, as retellings are scaffolded (McKeough, 1992). It is unclear why a similar task difference was not observed in the current study. More research is needed to understand this phenomenon.

Factors Related to Narrative Complexity. To investigate the factors related to narrative complexity, two standard regressions were run for story retelling and original storytelling. Results showed that age and spoken language ability were both related to original storytelling complexity, and that age was related to story retelling complexity in First Nations students. This suggests that part of the variability in original story storytelling can be explained by knowing children's age and language ability, and that part of the variability in story retelling can be explained by knowing the child's age.

Applebee (1978), Peterson and McCabe (1983), and McKeough (1992), among others, have provided evidence for the relationship of age to narrative competence. Additionally, a vast amount of research exits that shows a link between spoken language ability and storytelling capacity. Vocabulary and grammar are a fundamental component of narrative; oral stories cannot

be told without them. Beyond that obvious observation, vocabulary and grammar also allows children to remember events and communicate them to others (Haden, Ornstein, Eckerman, & Didow, 2001; Nelson & Fivish, 2004). To illustrate, appropriate use of nouns and pronouns not only make stories understandable, they allow children to make links across referents and events (e.g., "Me and my mom and sister went to Mexico. And she cut her foot and it bled in the water and it might not be clean;" Peterson, 1993; Shapiro & Hudson, 1997). By four years of age, children begin to qualify the nouns and verbs they use by using adjectives and prepositional phrases (e.g., "the spotty dog" and "ran on the beach"). They also use verbs to express desires (e.g., wanted) and cognitive states (e.g., thought and knew; De Villiers, 1979). Temporal markers (e.g., yesterday, then, and before) allow children to order events chronological (Tomasello, 2006) and causal conjunctives (e.g., because, so) and adversative conjunctives (e.g., but) allow preschoolers to encode relations between events in their daily lives and to use them when they recall those events with others (Hood & Bloom, 1979). Increasingly, between the ages of four to eight years, children use these words to produce more sophisticated syntax in the original stories they create (McKeough et al., 2005), which adds interest and depth to the child's personal and fictional narratives.

The findings of the present study related to original storytelling corroborate these findings. However, the present findings related to story retelling do not. That is, although age accounted for some of the variance in story retelling, language did not. This may have been because storytelling requires that children create their own stories by using words in their vocabulary and expressing them through spoken language. In contrast, story retelling requires the use of memory more so than vocabulary and spoken language.

It should be noted that in the current study, knowledge of positional concepts were not related to narrative ability. The measure used to assess children's knowledge of positional concepts measured elements such as quantity (more, less, some, equal), space (left, right, centre, above), and time (always, before, starting, never). With the exception of time, these concepts are not typically present in the narratives of young children and so it is reasonable that, on the whole, positional concepts did not account for a significant amount of the variance in the children's narratives.

Other Factors that Influence Oral Narrative Development. The results of this study showed that age accounted for 20% of the variability in story retelling, and that age and language ability accounted for 24% of the variability in original storytelling. Extant research has identified several additional factors, not examined in the present study, that account for oral narrative development. These include parent conversational style (Fivish, Haden, & Reese, 2006), exposure to storybooks (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001), and cultural influences (Adelson, 2008). These factors are discussed in what follows.

Parent Talk. Several researchers have examined both the type of parent-child talk and the amount of talk directed to the child and those relationships to narrative development. Research has found that some parents, referred to as highly elaborative tend to ask more questions of their children introduce new information about topics and respond to and confirm children's contributions. This has been found to an important factor in narrative development (Fivish, Haden, & Reese, 2006). In addition, the amount of talk directed to the child is another critical factor in narrative development. Hart and Risley (1995) determined that large differences exist between the number of words that parents address to their children across socioeconomic groups.

Research has also found a strong relationship between the number of words directed toward children and the child's language and cognitive outcomes. Parental talk can also increase children's vocabulary growth (Biemiller & Slonin, 2001). Additionally, parental or caregiver conversations about past events have been shown to provide substantial help in children's narrative development and also in aiding in their ability to remember past events (Fivish & Haden, 2003)

Exposure to Stories and Storybooks. Another key factor that support both language and narrative development is children's exposure to storybooks. Whitehurst and Lonigan (2001) suggested that parents contribute to children's narrative development through storybook reading. Through repeated exposure to storybooks children become familiar with the structure and features of stories. These features include sequencing of events, reference to mental states and particular happenings, and models of good story structure and content.

Culture. Lastly, in their study of cross-cultural differences, Ball (2008), Gutierrez-Clellen and Quinn (1993), and Westby, Moore and Roman (2002) have noted that culture influences a variety of factors related to the development of narrative capacity. These factors include language and uses of language, the macrostructure and microstructure of narrative, story themes, and paralinguistic strategies.

Thus, previous research clearly provides evidence that numerous factors, beyond those measured in the current study, account for variability in oral narrative. The proportion of variability that was not accounted for by age and spoken language ability within the present study might well be accounted for by a combination of the aforementioned factors.

Limitations

The current research is not without limitations. First, due to the nature of the population, special care was needed when working with participants in this study. Students were generally shy, quiet, and somewhat hesitant to converse. Researchers had to approach the task of assessing these students with sensitivity, open-mindedness, and patience. Story elicitation was often a time consuming task that required the researcher to create a comfortable setting where the student felt at ease and to be provide ample time for the student to retell or tell a story. Students also tended to have somewhat lengthy pauses between statements of the story. It was important for researchers not to rush students and allow them as much time as possible so that they did not end their recollections or stories prematurely. In addition, when assessing students with the standardized measures, it was especially important to create a good rapport with the students. Despite these efforts it is possible that this general reluctance to converse may have led to an underestimation of the children's storytelling ability, both recalled and original.

Second, one of the measures chosen for this study did not have age-appropriate norms for the entire sample. The TELD-3 did not have normative data for children over the age of 7:11 and eight of the participants were older than 7:11. This resulted in incomplete data for some of the second grade students.

A third limitation was group size. Overall group sizes and the small number of participants in each group limited the statistical power in this study. With an increased number of participants in each group more information could have been gathered.

A final limitation involved the cultural appropriateness of the assessment measures used. The TELD-3, Boehm-3, and the narrative assessment measures all required the use of language for standardized administration. A number of the participants in this study faced expressive and

receptive language challenges and, as such, may not have entirely understood what was required of them or may not have had the language to fully communicate their stories.

Future Directions

Overall, however, the present findings move us somewhat closer to understanding of factors involved in the oral narrative development of First Nations children aged 5 to 8 years. As such, it offers some interesting directions for future research. Future research might examine parental influences on narrative development. An examination of factors such as conversational style and literacy-related child-rearing practices (e.g., exposure to storybooks) would be interesting avenues to study. More specifically, it would be interesting to examine the narrative skills of families of successful literacy learners versus less successful literacy learned families. An examination of how families engage in narrative activities and how these vary cross-culturally would provide additional insight into the development of narrative development. In addition, future research might expand the research described in this study by using an older group of students. With a more complete picture of potential influences on narrative development, programming and interventions could be better planned and put in place. This research should be approached in a culturally sensitive, respectful manner with strong contribution from members of the community.

Summary

Research has long recognized that First Nations students face language and literacy challenges (Lucchese & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007) for a variety of reasons, including forced loss of language and culture, poverty, and school attendance (Adelson, 2008; Lucchese & Tamis-

LeMonda, 2007). The devastating effects of residential schooling are partially responsible for a number of the challenges the First Nations students face. The traumatic experience of being stripped of their native language, legends, and customs has created a number of difficulties in terms of communication, language development, and educational and occupational opportunities (Adelson, 2008). These factors also influence parent conversational style, child rearing practices, and overall well being (Adelson, 2008). It is reasonable to assume that these factors are involved in the performance of participants in the current study, which may well account for the low average performance on measures requiring verbal responses.

In spite of the challenges they face, First Nations students are often underrepresented in the literature, especially with regards to narrative and language development. Because narrative ability is a strong predictor of academic success in general, and of literacy and language competence, in particular, research into its developmental growth is crucial. Overall the current research contributes much needed information on how oral narrative develops in First Nations children. It is important for First Nations students to be aware of their own culture and values, but at the same time, to have them succeed and advance in mainstream society (Duane Mark, personal communication, February 20th, 2009). Hence, this study is an attempt to elucidate the understanding of the relationship between First Nations narrative development and the learning that occurs within a mainstream educational context.

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Appendix A

McKeough Oral Narrative Evaluation Rubric

1. Does the child identify a character of characters
2. Is one state and/or event reported?
3. Is a sequence of two or more events of states given (T-units)
4. How many t-units
5. Are connectives such as "and" and "then" used to link events temporally?
6. Are connectives such as "because" and "so" used to link events temporally (causal)?
7. Are connectives such as "but" and "though" used to show contrasting relations between events (adversatives)
8. Are mental states (e.g., thoughts, feelings, desires), or social judgments explicitly mentioned
9. How many?
10. Are the individual events related to a central occurrence?
11. Are the events ordered in a temporal sequence?
12. Does the story have a problem?
13. Is the problem solved?
14. Do the mental states change as the story progresses (e.g., from sad to happy or from desire to satisfaction)?
15. Do complicating events, sub-problems, or failed attempts prevent immediate problem resolution?
16. # of action or descriptive t-units
17. # of intentional t-units
18. Developmental story-telling level (0-6)

Appendix B

Story Samples

Level 0:

They ran away.

Level 1:

A little girl wanted to get on a horse. That little boy came and said "Can I get on with you? And the other boy said no. That other girl said, "what do you want to go on?" He said, "For a ride."

Level 2:

A little boy and his horse. And the horse was running. And then he falled and he got hurt. And he went back on to the horse. And he ride him and he went back home.

Appendix C

SNAP Factual and Inferential Questions (Strong, 1998)

1. Where did Tom keep his pet frog?

2. What happened when the dog leaned out the window with a jar on his head.

3. Why did the bees chase the dog?

4. What happened when the deer stopped quickly at the edge of a cliff?

5. What did Tom and the dog hear when they landed in the pond?

6. Why did the frog escape from the jar?

7. Why did the deer run with Tom on his head?

8. Why did the deer run along beside the deer, barking at him?

9. Why did Tom and the dog smile when they heard the croaking sound?

10. Why was Tom's frog sitting proudly with a mother frog?

Appendix D

Certification of Institutional Ethics Review

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS REVIEW

This is to certify that the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary has examined the following research proposal and found the proposed research involving human subjects to be in accordance with University of Calgary Guidelines and the Tri-Council Policy Statement on *"Ethical Conduct in Research Using Human Subjects"*. This form and accompanying letter constitute the Certification of Institutional Ethics Review.

File no:	**5934**
Applicant(s):	**Angela D. Romaine**
Department:	**Applied Psychology, Division of**
Project Title:	**The Development of Oral Narrative in First Nation Students**
Sponsor (if applicable):	

Restrictions:

This Certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Approval is granted only for the project and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modifications to the authorized protocol must be submitted to the Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for approval.
3. A progress report must be submitted 12 months from the date of this Certification, and should provide the expected completion date for the project.
4. Written notification must be sent to the Board when the project is complete or terminated.

Janice Dickin

Janice Dickin, Ph.D, LLB,
Chair
Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board

4 December 2008

Date:

Distribution: (1) Applicant, (2) Supervisor (if applicable), (3) Chair, Department/Faculty Research Ethics Committee, (4) Sponsor, (5) Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (6) Research Services.