Legal and Criminological Psychology (2004), 9, 37–56

www.bps.org.uk

The application of a 'story-telling' framework to investigative interviews for suspected child sexual abuse

Helen L. Westcott* and Sally Kynan
Forensic Psychology Research Group, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

Purpose. This study investigated the usefulness of a 'story-telling' approach to understanding investigative interviews with children suspected of being sexually abused.

Method. An innovative framework for understanding children's allegations of sexual abuse was devised from the 'story-telling' literature, which examined the degree to which essential elements of a story, as well as order or disorder of narrative, were present in accounts of alleged abuse. Other features of the interview, such as the presence of free narrative, reliance on specific questions to elicit an account and bizarre or 'off-topic' responses from the child, were also recorded. Transcripts of 70 interviews with children aged up to 12 years, from England and Wales, were coded using a scheme devised specifically for the purpose of the study.

Results. The results suggest that although, superficially, the accounts adhered to a story structure, they were often incomplete, ambiguous and disordered to a degree which would impact on understanding. Reliance on specific questions, and other digressionary or non verbal responses from the child also compounded difficulties. Age differences in responding were noted, with the youngest children responding differently from their older peers.

Conclusions. Implications for practice include the importance of careful questioning and the value of a second interviewer monitoring the interview. The story-telling framework was a useful tool in suggesting where difficulties may arise for the child in presenting his/her account, and for an observer (e.g. juror) in making sense of the child's experience as elicited in the interview.

Videotaped investigative interviews with children suspected of being sexually abused have been accepted in criminal proceedings in England and Wales since the Criminal Justice Act of 1991 (Westcott, Davies, & Spencer, 1999). Such interviews, usually

*Correspondence should be addressed to Dr Helen L. Westcott, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, The Open University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK (e-mail: H.L.Westcott@open.ac.uk).

conducted by police officers and social workers, may replace the child's live evidence-in-chief at trial. Successive Acts in England and Wales have sought to clarify and facilitate the role children may have as witnesses in criminal proceedings, culminating in the 1999 Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act, which anticipates videotaped cross-examination ahead of trial, in addition to videotaped evidence-in-chief (Home Office, 2002). Such videotaped interviews are conducted according to government guidance – the *Memorandum of Good Practice* (Home Office, 1992) at the time this research was conducted, subsequently revised and republished as *Achieving Best Evidence* (Home Office, 2002). Both documents advocate a four-phase interview comprising rapport-building, the elicitation of a free narrative account from the child, questioning and closure. The complex and emotionally charged nature of such interviews can make them particularly difficult for interviewers and children alike (Poole & Lamb, 1998; Wade & Westcott, 1997). In addition, legal and procedural constraints, e.g. on the types of questions and comments permitted of the interviewer, and regarding the various tasks required (e.g. the truth and lie 'ceremony' in rapport) could have consequences for the coherence of any account that is obtained from the child. Wattam (1992) has emphasized how much investigative interviews are unlike natural conversation.

Wade, Lawson, and Aldridge (1998) spent seven months in one English crown court observing all trials which involved evidence from child witnesses. They identified four issues associated with the use of videotaped testimony: a lack of specificity in important aspects of the evidence, increased demands upon the concentration of those listening to the testimony (e.g. jurors), the inclusion of facts not generally admitted through live examination, and problems associated with a lack of neutrality in the interviewer. The combined impact of these issues was often to make it very difficult for an observer to discern an adequate 'story-line' in the child's testimony.

Davis, Hoyano, Keenan, Maitland, and Morgan (1999), in their study of the admissibility and sufficiency of evidence in child abuse prosecutions, also described children's accounts in videotaped interviews as 'typically rambling and incoherent' (p. x). Davis *et al*. concluded that it was impossible for interviewers to reconcile the competing demands of the criminal investigation, child protection enquiry and evidence-in-chief within the interview, with the result that testimony was often 'incomplete, inadmissible, or difficult for the jury to understand and evaluate' (p. ix).

The purpose of the present research was therefore to investigate such issues further, pursuing the 'story-telling' analogy. We were interested in reasons why videotaped evidence from children may be problematic from the perspective of an observer, or juror. (In the UK, researchers are not allowed to approach jurors directly to elicit feedback.) In so doing, we wished to consider the meaning of the child's account as a whole, and as a story describing the child's experience.

A 'story-telling' framework – its relevance to interviews for suspected child sexual abuse

Bennett and Feldman (Bennett, 1978; Bennett & Feldman, 1981) carried out an ethnographic study of criminal trials in one US superior court. They concluded that 'story-telling' was the 'common communication bond' that enables the different actors in a trial – defendant, lawyers, judge, witnesses and jurors – to present, hear and make sense of evidence. This story-telling framework is particularly relevant to cases of child sexual abuse, because:

> Stories are symbolic reconstructions of events and actions. People who cannot manipulate symbols within a narrative format may be at a disadvantage even when, as witnesses or defendants, they are telling the truth. Moreover, the interpretation of stories requires that teller and listener share a set of norms, assumptions, and experiences. If witnesses and jurors differ in their understanding of society and social action, stories that make sense to one actor in a trial may be rejected by another. (Bennett & Feldman, 1981, p. 6)

Children suspected of being sexually abused *are* likely to have difficulty 'manipulating symbols in a narrative format' when they are asked to describe in words intimate, and possibly embarrassing, acts for which they may not know the correct terminology (Walker & Warren, 1995). Further, it is likely that the child witness and the jurors (and other adults present in the courtroom) will *not* share a 'set of norms, assumptions and experiences' in relation to the alleged sexual abuse.

> Everyday life is, after all, the sole source of our original fund of words. Experience is the source of meaning, and what we need to keep in mind when we talk to children is that mutual experience cannot be assumed. Not with life, and not with words. (Walker & Warren, 1995, p. 156)

Within a story-telling framework, inconsistency and ambiguity in a narrative are crucial, because the judge and jury (the story 'listeners') must be able to do three things:

(1) Identify the central action of the story (i.e. the alleged abusive activity).
(2) Construct inferences about the relationships between the different elements of the story which surround the central action (e.g. opportunity and motive to carry out alleged abuse or to make a false allegation).
(3) Test the internal consistency and descriptive adequacy/completeness of the relationships between these different story elements (i.e. make a plausibility or credibility judgement on the allegation as a whole).

It is therefore essential that jurors are able to construct a 'story-line' at some point in the child's interview in order to assimilate disjointed information into a coherent story. This structure will also alert jurors to information that might be missing in the child's account and which 'could alter the significance of the (alleged perpetrator's) action' (Bennett & Feldman, 1981, p. 10). 'Stories employ assumptions about causal order and the linear sequence of action as aids to the identification of a central action and critical junctures in its development.' (Bennett & Feldman, 1981, p. 48). This linearity may be particularly difficult to identify in videotaped allegations of abuse, especially if that abuse is repeated on different occasions (e.g. Wood, McClure, & Birch, 1996).

This type of analysis has no regard to the truth or falsity of the evidence presented. However, it may be anticipated that children's allegations of sexual abuse are particularly likely to be structurally inadequate or imprecisely recounted, owing to children's lesser cognitive abilities and experiences in recalling events in this way (e.g. Baker-Ward & Ornstein, 2002; Saywitz, 2002). Walker and Warren comment:

> Adults have high standards for 'telling what happened', for giving, in other words, a personal narrative of some past event. The model we hold for a satisfactory narrative includes a setting that introduces both place and players, initiating action, central action, goals of the people involved and consequences .... We expect to be alerted if events are not related chronologically, and we expect to be given a clear picture as the events unfold of who is involved in what. In order to provide a satisfactory narrative of a personal event, then, the teller must have ... a great deal of organizational skill, must be able to give clear

> descriptions … and, critically, must *know what knowledge is important to share with the listener*. These are not skills that children can be relied upon to possess independently, until, in some cases, the mid teens. (1995, p. 160, original emphasis)

Thus, the story-telling framework may go some way to explaining potential problems in understanding children's videotaped evidence-in-chief.

Key components in a story

A successful account will thus have an identifiable setting, concern and resolution – essentially, the where, when, what, who, why and outcome (Bennett & Feldman, 1981). Stein and Nezworski (1978) differentiated between the 'setting' which includes information about the social, physical and temporal context (e.g. how the child and alleged perpetrator knew each other, when and where the alleged abuse took place) and the 'episode' (i.e. the alleged abuse). The episode consists of five categories, which can be applied to the current research as follows:

- *Initiating event* – some type of event or action which marks a change in the story development. Here, this may be the beginning of an allegedly abusive act.
- *Internal response* – such as goals, affective states or cognitions evoked by the initiating event, which serve to motivate a character's behaviour. Here, we are not privy to the alleged perpetrator's internal response, but this is loosely linked to the alleged perpetrator's apparent reason for behaving as the child describes, whether for legitimate or abusive intentions – hereafter this component will be referred to as the *alleged perpetrator's apparent purpose*.
- *Attempt* – actions which describe the character's overt behaviour. Here, this equates with what the alleged perpetrator is described as doing, and is the central action in the child's account which jurors must identify – hereafter this component will be referred to as the *alleged abuse activities*.
- *Consequence* – the result of the character's actions, which may be the attainment or not of the character's goal. This category is excluded from the present study as we are not privy to the alleged perpetrator's goal, nor are we interested in outcomes of cases.
- *Reaction* – the character's response to the consequence. Here again this category (concerning the alleged perpetrator) cannot be directly included, but it can be noted whether the *child* reported his or her feelings (physical or psychological) in response to the alleged events.

Given the nature of the stories in this research, that is, allegations of abuse, it was anticipated that the setting and attempt components would be most important, as they would likely indicate any criminal activities, and thus would contribute most towards any subsequent decision to prosecute and/or convict. As the perpetrator was known to the child in most of the sample (and thus identification was not an issue for most of the children), perpetrator identity was not included as a story-telling component in the analyses.

Research questions

The following four questions were identified as a result of the literature review:

(1) Do children's accounts in videotaped investigative interviews (*Memorandum* interviews; Home Office, 1992) adhere to a basic story structure? (That is, do they comprise the necessary components and order?)

(2) Where do ambiguities and inconsistencies arise in children's accounts? (That is, are particular story components affected?)
(3) Are there age-differences in children's accounts with respect to (1) and (2)?
(4) What other features of the interview may impact on the presence or absence of a coherent story in the child's account?

At the time the research was conducted, it was possible to feed the (unpublished) results into the revision of the government's *Memorandum* guidance on videotaped interviews with children (Home Office, 2002).

Method

Sample

Interview transcripts from a previous study of questioning practice (Sternberg, Lamb, Davies, & Westcott, 2001) were used here with permission. Transcripts of 70 videotaped *Memorandum* interviews concerning suspected sexual abuse were retained from an original sample of 119, having excluded transcripts involving multiple perpetrators, where no touching was alleged, where the child was a witness only, and where the submitting police force believed the allegation to be false. This was to reduce the variability in allegations, and thus obtain some degree of homogeneity in the sample. Transcripts of interviews with 51 females and 19 males, submitted by 12 police forces in England and Wales were included. These interviews were carried out in the period 1994–1997. There were 20 transcripts from children aged under 7 years, 22 transcripts from children aged 7–9 years and 28 interviews from children aged 10–12 years. For all children, English was their first language.

Characteristics of the allegations in the interviews

The most common allegation for all age groups concerned indecency with a child (80%, n = 56), with other allegations concerning buggery (10%, n = 7), sexual intercourse (9%, n = 6) and abduction (1%, n = 1). No allegations for under sevens concerned sexual intercourse (compared with 14% of 7–9-year-olds, and 11% of 10–12-year-olds), and comparatively fewer of allegations concerning the oldest children involved buggery (15, 14 and 4% for the three age groups, respectively). The identity of the alleged perpetrator included natural and step-fathers, family members, neighbours, etc., and overwhelmingly the alleged perpetrator was known to the child (19%, n = 8, were strangers). The sample almost equally comprised single (41%, n = 29) and multiple incidents (43%, n = 30; 16%, n = 11, missing data). The presence of multiple incidents has significant implications for the coherence of the story-line – both for researchers attempting to code each, and for jurors attempting to create a coherent story-line – as discussed below.

In 29% (n = 20) of interviews there was some other evidence (e.g. medical) beyond the child's account [51% (n = 36) no other evidence, 20% (n = 14) missing data]. For 17% (n = 12) there was a perpetrator confession [61 % (n = 43) no confession, 21% (n = 15) missing data]. In 6% (n = 4) there had been a recantation prior to interview [73% (n = 51) no recantation, 21% (n = 15) missing data]. The case went to court in 70% of cases (n = 49), 14% (n = 10) did not go to court, 16% (n = 11) missing data.

Characteristics of the interviewers

The majority of interviewers were police officers (86%, n = 60), with 9% (n = 6) social workers, 4% (n = 3) police officer and social worker jointly interviewing together. There was one other interviewer, a child psychologist. Seventy-seven percent (n = 54)

of interviewers were female [14% (n = 10) male, 3% (n = 2) male and female together, 6% (n = 4) missing data]. Eighty-three percent (n = 58) of interviewers had received training in the government's guidance on interviewing children (*The Memorandum of Good Practice*; Home Office, 1992). One interviewer had not received *Memorandum* training, with 16% (n = 11) missing data. Seven percent of interviewers (n = 5) had less than 1 year's experience of interviewing children, with the majority 60% (n = 42) having 1–5 years' experience of interviewing children, 10% (n = 7) more than 5 years' experience, and 23% were (n = 16) unknown. There were no discernible differences in interviewer experience of interviewing across age groups.

Procedure

A coding scheme developed specifically for this project was applied to each interview transcript.

Coding scheme

Each transcript was coded for both 'story-telling components' and 'related features'. The related features included those which fell outside the story-telling framework, but which our pre-pilot and the existing literature on interviewing (e.g. Poole & Lamb, 1998; Westcott, Davies, & Bull, 2002) suggested might be relevant to the presence or absence of a coherent story in the child's account.

Story-telling components

Each of the story-telling components (setting, initiating event, alleged perpetrator's apparent purpose, alleged abuse activities, child's reaction) was coded for presence/absence and clarity. In addition, the setting and alleged abuse activities components were coded for ambiguity and inconsistency.

'Ambiguity' was defined as 'detail open to more than one meaning or interpretation', and 'inconsistency' was defined as 'detail in allegation differs at two or more points in the interview'. Where ambiguity or inconsistency were noted, the interviewer's response was also noted (i.e. did interviewer attempt to clarify, and were they successful?). Also, for these components, the nature of any outstanding issues was noted (i.e. general lack of detail or specific gaps in the child's account).

Coding the *temporal aspect* of the setting, when the abuse occurred, proved to be particularly difficult, especially for accounts relating to multiple incidents of alleged abuse. In an attempt to document this aspect of the setting, it was noted whether the number of alleged incidents could be identified, and, where possible, the alleged abuse was coded as 'very recent – recent – distant' (or 'can't tell'). 'Very recent' was defined as 'occurred in the month prior to interview'; 'recent' was defined as 'occurred in 2–6 months prior to interview'; and 'distant' was defined as 'occurred more than 6 months prior to interview'.

The degree of linearity or order in the child's account was coded following Stein and Nezworski (1978). A 'disordered' account is one in which

(1) The episodic aspect of the story is violated in terms of logic/causality i.e. the only logical connection between statements is 'and'.
(2) The 4 or 5 categories of the episode (i.e. the who, what, where, etc.) are placed in a *random* sequence, not a temporal one.

Thus each account was rated as 'not at all disordered – partially disordered – very disordered', such that 'not at all disordered' = meets neither (1) or (2) criteria; 'partially disordered' = meets either (1) *or* (2); and 'very disordered' = meets (1) *and* (2).

Related features

The presence/absence and detail/vagueness of any spontaneous allegation by the child (however brief) was noted, as was what story-telling components (i.e. setting, perpetrator identity, alleged action) it contained. A spontaneous allegation is any comment or reference to the alleged abuse activities made by the child at the outset of the interview, in the absence of any questioning or prompting by the interviewer. Similarly, if a free narrative account was offered by the child in response to the interviewer's first substantive question or prompt, the components present in this were noted too. Whether or not the account was elicited through specific questions was coded, as was the presence or absence of any 'bizarre' or 'off topic' responses from the child, where bizarre was defined as 'response unusual in circumstances, not appropriate or not expected answer to previous questions', and off topic was defined as 'disregards question completely and speaks to/answers something else'. Finally, the presence/absence of nonverbal responses offered by the child (e.g. gesticulations, shaking head) was also recorded.

Pilot studies

A series of pilots was conducted using transcripts from the original sample that were disregarded for this study. The coding scheme was first 'pre-piloted' for likely feasibility by the second author only, on one transcript from each age group. It was then piloted in full by both authors on 15 transcripts (5 from each age group), with overall percentage agreement of 83%. This included agreement of 76% for story-telling components (range 60% for initiating event to 85% for setting information), and 90% for related features (range 80% for nonverbal responses to 100% for presence of spontaneous allegation; SA). In order to obtain further practice after discussion of these findings, a further pilot of six interviews (two from each age group) was carried out. Also, at this stage, some minor additions to the 'related features' coding were made for the purpose of improvement, i.e. coding the vagueness/detail of the SA, noting the contents of SA/FN, noting the reliance on specific questions). Overall percentage agreement between the authors of 94% was obtained at this stage; 97% for story-telling components (range 86% for reaction to 100% for initiating event, alleged abuser's apparent purpose, and child's reaction) and 92% for related features (range 83% for nonverbal responses to 100% for SA presence, vagueness, and components, FN presence and use of specific questions). Thus, in total, the scheme was piloted by both authors on 21 transcripts (equivalent to 30% of the sample size of 70). Subsequently, all coding was completed by the second author only.

Problems with the transcription, such as the presence of many untranscribed inaudibles, and the omission of nonverbal gestures referred to in the speech, were noted in 65 (93%) of interviews. This will not surprise researchers familiar with such interviews, but does itself pose questions about ease of reading (or following a story) for those who might see the transcript (e.g. a barrister), with a view to presenting the child's account in court.

Results

Story-telling components

Setting of the allegation

The description of the 'setting' in an account of alleged abuse should contain information that locates the alleged activities in a social, temporal and physical

Table 1. Inconsistencies and ambiguities in the child's description of the setting and alleged abuse activities

	Inconsistent No. (%)		Ambiguous No. (%)	
Story component	Yes	No	Yes	No
Setting description				
Under 7 years	2 (10)	18 (90)	17 (85)	3 (15)
7–9 years	2 (9)	20 (91)	11 (50)	11 (50)
10–12 years	2 (7)	26 (93)	7 (25)	21 (75)
Total for sample	6 (9)	64 (91)	35 (50)	35 (50)
Alleged abuse activities description				
Under 7 years	1 (5)	19 (95)	12 (60)	8 (40)
7–9 years	0 (0)	22 (100)	6 (27)	16 (73)
10–12 years	3 (11)	25 (89)	8 (29)	20 (71)
Total for sample	4 (6)	66 (94)	26 (37)	44 (63)

context. That is, how the child knew the alleged perpetrator, as well as when and where the alleged abuse took place. First, a combined measure for setting that combined information from all three categories was calculated, showing the degree to which inconsistency or ambiguity was present. This is shown in Table 1.

The relative lack of inconsistencies may be explained by the sparsity of the children's accounts. The few inconsistencies noted were found to apply equally to the social context, physical and temporal aspects of the setting information (they were not exclusive categories – an individual child could be inconsistent about more than one aspect), and interviewers attempted to clarify them all, with partial (n = 3) or total (n = 3) success.

Ambiguities were more of a problem in the children's accounts, featuring in 50% of interviews, particularly for the youngest children, and were found more with respect to the temporal aspect of the setting (n = 16), than to the social context (n = 9) or physical aspect (n = 10) (again the categories were not exclusive). Interviewers attempted to clarify all but 3 of these ambiguities, with mixed success (n = 5 successful, n = 9 partially successful, n = 18 unsuccessful).

Table 2 shows whether the *social context aspect* of the setting for the allegation was clear for all incidents contained in the account, or whether there was some confusion for the social context of one or more of the incidents described.

Thus the social context of the allegation, such as how the child knew the alleged perpetrator, was clear for the majority of children, even three quarters of the youngest group. The clarity of the *physical aspect* of the setting for the allegation is shown in Table 2. Again, this aspect of the setting information was offered by the majority of children, such that they described where the alleged abuse took place. However, for half the children in the sample, there was a lack of clarity about the number of incidents of abuse being alleged (Table 2). A substantial proportion of these were children under 7 years old, and here is the first illustration of a pattern that frequently appears subsequently, whereby the youngest children are behaving in a way noticeably different from the other two age groups. This was significant, $\chi^2(2) = 6.73$, $p < .05$. In addition, the authors were unable to tell whether the alleged abuse had happened recently or in the past in 40% of interviews (Table 2).

Table 2. Story-telling components in the child's allegation: clarity and associated issues[a]

Component/issue	Under 7 years (%)	7–9 years (%)	10–12 years (%)	Total (%)
Clarity of social context (*setting*)				
Clear for all incident(s)	15 (75)	21 (96)	26 (93)	62 (89)
Some confusion	5 (25)	1 (4)	2 (7)	8 (11)
Clarity of physical context (*setting*)				
Clear for all incident(s)	14 (70)	20 (91)	28 (100)	62 (89)
Some confusion	6 (30)	2 (9)	0 (0)	8 (11)
Could the number of alleged incidents be clearly identified? (*setting*)				
Yes	5 (25)	14 (64)	15 (54)	34 (49)
No	15 (75)	8 (36)	13 (46)	36 (51)
Is the alleged abuse recent or past? (*setting*)				
Very recent	6 (30)	6 (27)	14 (50)	26 (37)
Recent	3 (15)	3 (14)	4 (14)	10 (14)
Distant	0	2 (9)	4 (14)	6 (9)
Can't tell	11 (55)	11 (50)	6 (21)	28 (40)
Is there a clear *initiating event* for the alleged abuse?				
Initiating event clear	11 (55)	18 (82)	26 (93)	55 (79)
Initiating event unclear	9 (45)	4 (18)	2 (7)	15 (21)
Was the *alleged perpetrator's apparent purpose* abusive or legitimate?				
Apparently abusive	15 (75)	20 (91)	26 (93)	61 (87)
Apparently legitimate	1 (5)	2 (9)	2 (7)	5 (7)
Unclear	4 (20)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (6)
Clarity of the *alleged abuse* activities				
Clear for all incident(s)	8 (40)	17 (77)	22 (79)	47 (67)
Some confusion	12 (60)	5 (23)	6 (21)	23 (33)
Degree of disorder in the child's account				
Not at all disordered	3 (15)[b]	15 (68)	24 (86)	42 (60)
Partially disordered	9 (45)	5 (23)	4 (14)	18 (26)
Very disordered	7 (35)	2 (9)	0	9 (13)
Total *N* (%)	20 (100)	22 (100)	28 (100)	70 (100)

[a]Story component to which each part (a)–(g) refers to is given in italics. [b]One missing.

A substantial number of 'outstanding questions' regarding the setting information remained across age groups: (n = 18 (26%) about social context; n = 18 (26%) about physical context; and n = 35 (50%) about temporal context – the categories are not mutually exclusive. For all ages, more of the outstanding questions related to the temporal context, but this was particularly marked for those aged under 7 (n = 17) compared to the older children (n = 9 for both 7–9 and 10–12 years). Children's difficulties with temporal marking are well known (e.g. Friedman, 1990, 1991), and the presence of multiple alleged incidents for a substantial number of children in the sample is a likely contributing factor. The outstanding questions for social and physical context related to a general lack of detail in the children's accounts. For the temporal context, however, the outstanding questions included both a general lack of details (n = 28, 40%) and specific gaps in the child's account (n = 7, 10%).

Initiating event

The extent to which there appeared to be a clear initiating event for the alleged abuse is shown in Table 2. Although this does not appear to be such a problem for the older

children, for nearly half the interviews with those aged under 7 there was not a clear initiating event for the alleged abuse (and hence for their story of abuse).

The apparent purpose of the alleged abuser

The apparent purpose of the alleged perpetrator in interacting with the child, whether it appeared clearly abusive, or to be for legitimate reasons, is presented in Table 2. Overwhelmingly, the purpose appeared to be abusive, although again the component was less clear for those aged under 7 compared to the other two age groups. The lack of clarity for a substantial minority (20%) of the youngest children is notable.

Alleged abuse activities

The degree to which there were ambiguities and inconsistencies in the child's account regarding the alleged abuse activities is shown in Table 1. As with the setting information, inconsistencies in the children's description of the alleged abusive activities were rare. Interviewers attempted to clarify all four inconsistencies, with equal success and failure. Ambiguities about the alleged abusive activities were again more of a problem for all age groups, though notably for those aged under 7. The finding was significant, $\chi^2(2) = 6.28$, $p < .05$. Interviewers attempted to clarify all but one ambiguity, with mixed success ($n = 5$ successful, $n = 8$ partially successful, $n = 11$ unsuccessful, $n = 1$ missing).

Table 2 shows the clarity of the alleged abuse activities. This may relate to more or one incidents of alleged abuse in the child's account. Again, the under 7 years age group compares unfavourably with the others ($\chi^2(2) = 9.36$, $p < .01$), with some confusion over what the alleged perpetrator was said to have done in over half the interviews in this group. It may be, however, that differing activities experienced by children of different ages contributes to this finding, especially if those activities with the youngest children are the least specific or easily described, e.g. 'indecency'. Although there were no significant age trends, indecency was the most frequent alleged offence for the youngest children (85%; as it was for all children) and the under 7 years age group had no allegations of sexual intercourse. For many children outstanding questions remained about the alleged abuse activities as described in their accounts, with marked age differences ($n = 17$ (85%) outstanding questions for < 7-year-olds, $n = 11$ (50%) for 7–9-year-olds, and $n = 9$ (32%) for 10–12-year-olds; $X^2(2) = 13.19$, $p < .001$). In all but one case outstanding questions related to a general lack of detail rather than to specific gaps.

Child's reaction to the alleged abuse

Very few children ($n = 7$, 10%) spontaneously described physical sensations in response to the alleged abuse (e.g. that it hurt). None of the under 7-year-olds did so; 4 (18%) of 7–9-year-olds, and 3 (11%) of 10–12-year-olds offered such descriptions. Twice as many ($n = 14$, 20%) spontaneously described their emotional response to the alleged abuse (e.g. that they were sad, upset etc.), but these were again mostly the older children ($n = 1$ under 7, $n = 5$ 7–9, $n = 8$ 10–12). Interviewers elicited descriptions of both physical sensations ($n = 33$, 47%) and emotional responses ($n = 46$, 66%), through questioning. It may be that an apparent lack of spontaneous reaction negatively affects how the story is perceived by an observer, as the issue, abuse, might be expected to generate a lot of emotion in the child (e.g. Davies *et al.*, 1995). This speculation must remain tentative as we were coding verbal statements here, and the videotape may

Table 3. Related features of interviews

	Under 7 years (%)	7–9 years (%)	10–12 years (%)	Total (%)
The presence of a spontaneous allegation (SA) and free narrative (FN) from the child				
SA present	12 (60)	19 (86)	24 (86)[a]	55 (79)
SA absent	8 (40)	3 (14)	3 (11)	14 (20)
FN present	5 (25)	13 (59)	14 (50)	32 (46)
FN absent	15 (75)	9 (41)	14 (50)	38 (54)
Nature of the SA				
Vague	9 (75)	5 (26)	11 (46)	25 (45)
Detailed	3 (25)	14 (74)	13 (54)	30 (55)
Total giving SA	12 (100)	19 (100)	24 (100)	55 (100)
Use of specific questions to elicit account				
Only through specific questions	13 (65)[b]	7 (32)	9 (32)	29 (41)
Not just through specific questions	6 (30)	15 (68)	19 (68)	40 (57)
Total *N* (%)	20 (100)	22 (100)	28 (100)	70 (100)

[a]One missing case for SA.
[b]In one case it was judged that no real account had been elicited.

offer more evidence of nonverbal emotions from the child such as crying, lack of eye contact, differences in voice tone or volume.

Order/disorder in the child's account

The degree of disorder present in the child's account (however that account was elicited) was rated (Table 2). For over one third of the sample (n = 27, 39%) there was some degree of disorder which would impair the jury's ability to make sense of the child's evidence. Again, the age differences are notable, with only 15% of the youngest children giving an account which was not disordered to some degree, compared with 86% of the oldest children.

Related issues in interviews

Spontaneous allegation and free narrative

It was noted whether the child made a spontaneous allegation of abuse and/or gave a free narrative account of their abuse, however brief, before specific questioning from the interviewer. Results are presented in Table 3.

The relatively high percentages of children across all age groups who made a spontaneous allegation may be surprising, although these frequently were *extremely* brief, and vague (Table 3). Yet a substantial proportion of these children had made some sort of verbal disclosure prior to the *Memorandum* interview: half the under 7-year-olds (n = 10; n = 5 missing), twelve 7–9-year-olds (55%, n = 4 missing) and half 10–12-year-olds (n = 14, n = 5 missing).

For the first time in this research, children from the oldest age group are also performing poorly. It may be that different explanations for the lack of age differences in vagueness apply, such that the youngest children are vague because they have poor memories and/or poor verbal skills (e.g. Baker-Ward & Ornstein, 2002; Saywitz, 2002).

The oldest children may instead be vague as a result of embarrassment or self-consciousness about what they have to recount (Saywitz, Goodman, Nicholas, & Moan, 1991). Two examples are illustrative:

> Child: Daddy's not at our house any more. He's done a naughty thing to me.
> Interviewer: What has he done?
> Child: Er, his tidger smelled.
> Interviewer: Did it?
> Child: Yeah.
> Interviewer: And when you say his tidger smelled, what's his tidger?
> Child: Erm, my tidger went to his tidger.
> Interviewer: Did it. And where's your tidger?
> Child: Near daddy's tidger.
> Interviewer: Right. And where is it on your body?
> Child: There (indicating)
> Interviewer: Right, all right, okay.
> Child: And it's bonjour in my class now. (Girl aged 4 years)

> Interviewer: So is there anything you want to tell me?
> Child: Why?
> Interviewer: That you might want to tell us to sort of get it out in the open?
> Child: I want to tell you everything but I'd have to bring me mum in to tell you one thing because I'm not saying it.
> Interviewer: Tell us the stuff you want to say without your mum being here.
> Child: I want my mum now. So get that bit over and done with.
> Interviewer: The problem is, B, I mean your mum can come in the interview, that's no problem, but it's your interview. Really we ought to sort of hear things from you cos obviously your mum might not have got things quite right. I mean, you're the only person who knows exactly what you want to say.
> Child: Only because mum never forgets that one. She wrote it down on a piece of paper.
> Interviewer: Okay, but mummy wasn't actually there was she. And it's important that we know from someone that was actually there.
> Child: No!
> Interviewer: B, who do you want to talk to us about?
> Child: Gnnngh! (Boy aged 10 years)

The story-telling components present in the children's spontaneous allegations were coded (again, categories are not mutually exclusive). Most frequently mentioned was the alleged perpetrator's identity (n = 34, 49%), followed by some reference to the alleged activities (n = 30, 43%). Setting information (predominantly relating to the 'where' of the abuse) was given by 27 (39%) of children.

Thirty-two (46%) children gave a free narrative account, however brief (see Table 3). Most frequently mentioned here was the setting information, given by 48 (69%) of children. Thirty-one (44%) children referred to the alleged activities, and 16 (23%) included the perpetrator's identity (again categories are not mutually exclusive).

The use of specific questions

It was apparent that neither the presence of a spontaneous allegation nor a free narrative could be equated with an account from the child, as these were typically too brief and too vague. Therefore, it was noted whether the child's fullest account of the alleged activities was elicited only through specific questions asked by the interviewer, or through specific questions in addition to other means (e.g. the spontaneous allegation or free narrative from the child). Specific questions are defined as those which focus on a particular aspect of the child's account in order to seek clarification or

extension of that aspect (Home Office, 1992). The majority of questions in these interviews were of this type (Sternberg *et al.*, 2001). Table 3 shows that interviewers relied heavily on specific questions to elicit the child's account, even with the oldest group (approximately one third elicited the account solely through specific questions even with 10–12-year-olds). This pattern of questioning is likely to increase the disjointed nature of the child's evidence, with most of the talking being done by the adult interviewer, rather than the child witness.

Bizarre, off-topic and nonverbal responses from the children

Nine (13%) children (n = 5 under 7 years, n = 2 7–9 years, n = 2 10–12 years) gave some bizarre response(s) in their accounts (i.e. responses that were unusual in the circumstances, not appropriate or not expected in relation to previous question). A further 16 (23%) children (n = 9 under 7 years, n = 6 7–9 years, n = 1 10–12 years) included responses that were 'off topic' or unrelated to the interviewer's questions. Both these types of answers, and the presence of nonverbal responses from the child, may make it harder for the interviewer and an observer (e.g. juror) to identify and/or follow a story-line in the child's account, even when, as here, interviewers did attempt to clarify some or all of these responses. Nonverbal responses were provided by 47 (67%) children from all age-groups (n = 11, n = 16, n = 20, respectively) of which interviewers in 14 (30%) cases did not attempt to clarify. Again it is possible to speculate that different explanations may apply for nonverbal, bizarre and off-topic responses in the three groups. That is, such responses from a younger child may be because they do not know the answer, or are tired or bored, whereas the older children may be trying to deflect embarrassment or self-consciousness. Further research could examine this possibility (see also the excerpt from the 4-year-old above).

Discussion

The picture that emerges from these analyses is of children's accounts in videotaped interviews that are often incomplete, vague and disordered to a greater or lesser degree, thus supporting the work of Wade *et al.* (1998) and Davis *et al.* (1999). A number of other features of the interviews, such as the reliance on specific questions by interviewers, and the presence of bizarre, off-topic or nonverbal responses from the child, may contribute to the difficulty an observer (e.g. a juror) may have in following and understanding the child's account. These speculations could be further explored in empirical studies.

Do children's Memorandum accounts adhere to a basic story structure?

Superficially the answer to this question is 'yes'. For some children, especially those in the older age groups (7–12 years), the essential story components were present. The qualification to this statement is that although the components may have been present, their presence was often moderated by the degree of ambiguity also present, and the outstanding questions that remained. Even the presence of some free narrative and/or a spontaneous allegation, together with the basic components of a story, does not guarantee an adequate and coherent story in *Memorandum* interviews.

For example, although 'setting' information was likely to be noted regarding the social and physical aspects of the allegation (such as how the alleged perpetrator and

child were known to each other and where the alleged abuse took place), temporal information that would have located the alleged abuse in time was often missing. Outstanding questions were judged to remain about the setting details of the allegation, that is the information which provides the 'story' context for the allegation, and was especially marked for the under 7 years age group. This could result in the child's context for his/her account not being sufficiently established and shared with the jurors or other observers (e.g. the lawyer representing them). Problems could then ensue, since the alleged perpetrator's actions can be interpreted differently in different contexts.

The 'initiating event' could broadly be interpreted to be absent for the children under 7, but present for the 7–9 and 10–12-year-olds. Similarly, the alleged abuser's apparent purpose in interacting with the child was only ever unclear in cases of the youngest children. The alleged perpetrator's motive was apparently abusive for all groups.

A description of the alleged abuse activities was present for the majority of children, but again qualified by the child's age, ambiguities and outstanding questions. There remained some confusion about the alleged perpetrator's activities in well over half the interviews with children younger than 7 years. The child's (rather than perpetrator's) physical and emotional reactions to the alleged abuse were often present, but not necessarily spontaneously offered by the child. Rather, the interviewer elicited these aspects of the account through questioning. As noted previously, this might be interpreted as a lack of involvement in, and/or impact of, the alleged abuse – thus making it more difficult for jurors to establish a shared interpretation of the experience.

Story order or disorder may also have moderated the impact of the presence of the different story components. For nearly half the sample (n = 30, 43%), there was some degree of disorder which would impair the jury's ability to make sense of the child's evidence. In future research it would be interesting to unpick in more detail the nature of this disorder, to see whether children's accounts were randomly disordered, or whether the problem was one of causality. It might also be possible to explore the interaction between questioning types and disorder, especially whether specific questions increase the disorder in a child's account. As researchers, we felt that the definition of disorder applied to the transcripts seemed inadequate, and did not capture the real lack of detail and associated difficulties present in some of the children's stories.

Where in the story do ambiguities and inconsistencies arise?

Perhaps surprisingly, inconsistencies were rare and were not a problem for the accounts in this study. Ambiguities were much more of a problem, particularly as they affected descriptions of the setting and alleged abuse activities. Ambiguities in other story components were not coded in this study, but may also exist and compound those recorded here. In the courtroom, the defence barrister in cross-examination will seek to exploit such ambiguities, and as a result to deconstruct the child's narrative and reconstruct the story in the defendant's favour (e.g. Henderson, 2002).

The whole notion of ambiguity in children's accounts of abuse has been relatively neglected, although suggestibility might be conceived as an ambiguity issue (i.e. the difficulties in judging whether what the child says is wholly or partially true, deliberately false, or mistakenly believed; Ceci, Crossman, Scullin, Gilstrap, & Huffman, 2002; Vrij, 2002). The presence of bizarre, off-topic and nonverbal responses may contribute to the overall ambiguity of the child's account, as they may introduce competing

possible interpretations for ambiguous details. Jurors may interpret gaps or missing details in children's stories according to their own understanding of the events, which may not be the same as the child's. It is not clear, as such, whether jurors would 'unconsciously fill gaps in', or would rather judge such gaps to be indicators of deception by the child. Again, this question could possibly be explored further using experimental methods.

Why do ambiguities arise? Feelings of shame, embarrassment or reticence by the child, and ignorance of certain adult actions in a sexual context may be contributory factors (e.g. Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993; Wade & Westcott, 1997). There may be developmental factors in children's understanding (e.g. Saywitz, 2002), or differences in the nature of the activities experienced by children. Reliance on script memory in cases of repeated sexual abuse may also increase ambiguity, as specific details which may contextualize the child's story are omitted (e.g. Powell & Thomson, 2002). Interviewers can also compound ambiguities, by failing to clarify unclear statements, or by accepting nonverbal gestures without verbal clarification.

Are there age differences in story telling?

One notable aspect of the research results is the consistent pattern in age-related responding, which reached statistical significance for some measures. With the exception of vagueness in relation to the perpetrator's alleged activities, younger children (under 7) were poorer story-tellers than their older peers, as might have been expected. The findings from the current analysis therefore support research documenting age differences in children's general eye-witness performance and suggestibility (e.g. Ceci & Bruck, 1993). Given that these youngest children are the real targets for the legislative and procedural reforms in the area of child sexual abuse, the results reported here may be a cause for some concern. They also reinforce reported difficulties among police officers carrying out *Memorandum* interviews (e.g. Aldridge & Wood, 2000).

Age alone is not the whole story, however. Individual differences between children may be influential, especially as some of the children here may have been maltreated and thus functioning socially and cognitively at a different level from that suggested by their chronological ages (e.g. Beitchman, Zucker, Hood, daCosta, & Akman, 1991; Kendall-Tackett *et al.*, 1993). In the transcripts there was evidence across all age groups of large differences in children's ability to recount their experiences.

Other features of the interview that impact on the coherence of the child's story

A number of other features of *Memorandum* interviews have been described, many of which could affect the coherence of the emerging story or allegation. The high percentage of children offering some sort of spontaneous allegation is encouraging, although the brevity and vagueness of the spontaneous allegation and/or free narrative is problematic – both for the interviewer at the time, and for an observer subsequently (e.g. Wood *et al.*, 1996). The reliance on specific questions is problematic, though necessary if the child is not forthcoming, and also in order to prove specific charges. We know that specific questions comprised one third of the interviewer utterances in the main population of transcripts from which this sample was drawn (more than any other type of substantive utterance; Sternberg *et al.*, 2001), and it may be that such a predominance of specific questions may fragment the child's account and lead to errors in sequencing. Similarly, large numbers of nonverbal responses, or digressionary

answers, may make it more difficult for the interviewer to keep track of the child's account on the day, and for observers to discern a strong story-line.

Story-telling and credibility

The implications of the above observations for the credibility of children's accounts are emphasised by Bennett and Feldman:

> The structural properties of stories become more important in two kinds of judgement situations. First, structural characteristics become more central to judgement if facts or documentary evidence are absent ... Second, the structure of stories becomes critical to judgement in cases in which a collection of facts or evidence is subject to competing interpretations. (Bennett & Feldman, 1981, p. 90)

In cases of alleged child sexual abuse, both these kinds of judgement situations prevail – documentary, medical or other corroborative evidence is typically absent, and defendants are likely to offer a competing interpretation of events. In addition, children are particularly poor at telling stories of unfamiliar experiences, and the language used to describe sexual activities is especially allusive and imprecise (e.g. Wattam, 1992). Following Bennett and Feldman (1981), we would argue that weaknesses in the child's story relating to story components, disorder or other features, could therefore significantly negatively affect the credibility of the child's account. Indeed, credibility judgements can be viewed as a direct implication of the third 'job' of the story-listener outlined in the introduction: that is, to test the consistency and adequacy of the relationships between various story components (and hence to make a plausibility or credibility assessment).

For example, if there are many gaps in a child's evidence which impede the jury's ability to carry out the three 'listener' tasks described in the introduction (identify central action, construct inferences about the relationships between different elements of a story and test the consistency and adequacy of such relationships), then these 'structural ambiguities' will impact in a negative way on the judgment the jury is able to make.

> The higher the frequency of ambiguities, the more difficult it will be to interpret the central action, or the point, of the story. The higher the frequency of ambiguities, the more variation there will be in the interpretations of those members of the audience who do make sense of the story (since they will have to bring more of their own creative resources to the judgment task). Finally, as the number of ambiguities increases, the chance that the audience will accept the story as it stands as plausible or true decreases. (Bennett & Feldman, 1981, p. 68)

That is, if there are many ambiguities in the child's account, there will be more latitude for jurors to draw on their own experiences and beliefs in order to interpret the account in the light of the missing information. As noted earlier, large differences in the experiences and beliefs of jurors compared with children regarding life events generally, and child sexual abuse in particular, may make it difficult for the jury and the child to come to a shared interpretation of the child's account. The child's evidence, or story, is then likely to be judged less plausible, and an (inappropriate) acquittal may result.

Further research could explore this credibility dimension to the story-telling framework more fully (see discussion below) and could apply the story-telling framework to

adult accounts (e.g. of alleged rape), to examine whether and to what degree similar issues arise. The impact of problems noted in this research could also be explored using experimental manipulations.

Implications for practice

The current findings reiterate what is known about good questioning practice (e.g. Aldridge & Wood, 1998; Poole & Lamb, 1998; Westcott *et al.*, 2002; Wilson & Powell, 2001), although the difficulties posed by interviews with children aged under 7 are underlined. Interviewers should use specific questions as sparingly as possible, and such questions should be 'mapped' on to the part of the story the child is currently recalling, to avoid interrupting the story-line (and the child's memory; Fisher & Geiselman, 1992) as much as possible. Interviewers can help children by 'scaffolding' the child's story as it develops:

> [Adults] must provide an appropriate context for the open-ended questions that we ask. Rather than expecting the child to provide the setting that helps a story to make sense, we need to be prepared to provide it for that child. That means that *we* take the responsibility for naming the topic, as in 'Now lets's talk about –', and for providing the chronological scaffold that holds the topics together … Helping the child to build a coherent story also means that we listen to the implications of our own questions. (Walker & Warren, 1995, p. 160, original emphasis)

A practice interview can demonstrate the level and quantity of detail required to enhance the story quality, and thus reduce the reliance on specific questions or interviewer interruptions which may be detrimental to the coherence of the child's account. The closure phase is an opportunity for the interviewer to recap the child's narrative, and to gently challenge or clarify ambiguities.

The crucial role of the second interviewer in monitoring the developing story, and in identifying gaps, inconsistencies, ambiguities and disorder is suggested. At the end of the interview, the second interviewer can communicate any concerns regarding such issues with the lead interviewer, e.g. through an earpiece. However, Davis *et al.* (1999) found that second interviewers rarely carried out this role, especially if they were unfamiliar with the lead interviewer. At this early stage of the investigation, the second interviewer is taking the place of the juror in interpreting and evaluating the child's emerging story. This is important even though police interviewers are not necessarily interested in a story-line as such, but in specific details which indicate likely charges. It may be that using transcript materials in training and ongoing monitoring/supervision, as well as videotaped interviews, can helpfully sensitize interviewers to some of these issues (Warren *et al.*, 1999).

Evaluating the story-telling approach

The aim of this research was to consider the meaning of the child's account as a whole, and as a story describing the child's experience. The story-telling framework has been a useful tool for suggesting where difficulties may arise both for the child in presenting their account of alleged abuse, and for the observer in making sense of the child's experience as elicited in the interview. In complementing laboratory and field analyses of child witness interviews (e.g. Westcott *et al.*, 2002), the current research supports and extends earlier work demonstrating just how challenging investigative interviews can be. Inevitably, our conclusions are bound by the characteristics of the current sample, and a number of methodological considerations are required.

Most obviously, narratives of abuse in videotaped interviews differ from stories which have typically been included in existing research on story grammar, with implications for the goodness-of-fit of story components as coded here. In particular, multiple episodes of abuse are difficult to code simply using existing criteria and 'episode' components. At present, it is not clear whether the story-telling framework is simply that, or whether it may be predictive.

Ignorance of the truth or falsity of the evidence is both a strength and a weakness, as this mirrors what happens in court, yet means that we do not have an alternative measure of credibility. One interesting direction for a future study may be to compare the stories of child witnesses where there is no other evidence apart from the child's account, with those of children whose stories are supported by other evidence. In the current study, 56 cases had a prosecution of which we are aware; of these 56, 29 had no other evidence than the child's videotaped interview. One supposes that these children's accounts must be particularly credible. Davies and Burt (Davies, personal communication, July 2002) have recently found that the interviews of children with supportive physical or medical evidence contain significantly more Criteria Based Content Analysis (CBCA) criteria (indicating credibility; Vrij, 2000) than those interviews of children without such evidence.

The number of prosecutions in the sample as a whole suggests that despite the problems noted in this research, the children's stories must have been fairly persuasive. It may be that the videotaped stories are qualitatively different from their transcript versions which we were using. For example, in transcriptions, the emotional dimension is missing and may have moderated some of the ambiguities we noted. We have also already commented on the poor quality of some of the transcriptions. Further research which analyses a larger sample of videotaped (as opposed to transcribed) interviews could explore some of these issues. Further studies could also explore the relationship between the story-telling framework and other approaches to credibility assessment such as CBCA (Davies, Westcott, & Horan, 2000; Vrij, 2000).

Despite such considerations, we believe that the current research offers a new approach to understanding the dynamics and, potentially, the credibility of videotaped interviews. As applied in this study, the story-telling framework can act as a bridge between experimental, field and discourse approaches to such interviews.

Acknowledgements

This paper develops an earlier presentation to the 10th European Conference of Psychology and Law, in Limassol, Cyprus, April 2000. The authors wish to thank Michael Lamb and the late Kathleen Sternberg, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Bethesda, USA, for their permission to access the transcripts used in this research. Professor Ray Bull, Professor Graham Davies, Dr Becky Milne, Dr Clare Wilson and two anonymous reviewers provided helpful comments on earlier drafts.

References

Aldridge, M., & Wood, J. (2000). Interviewing child witnesses within *Memorandum* guidelines. *Children & Society, 14*, 168–181.

Aldridge, M., & Wood, J. (1998). *Interviewing children. A guide for child care and forensic practitioners*. Chichester: Wiley.

Baker-Ward, L., & Ornstein, P. A. (2002). Cognitive underpinnings of children's testimony. In H. L. Westcott, G. M. Davies, & R. H. C. Bull. (Eds.), *Children's testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice* (pp. 21–35). Chichester: Wiley.

Beitchman, J. H., Zucker, K. J., Hood, J. E., daCosta, G. A., & Akman, D. (1991). A review of the short-term effects of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 15*, 537–556.

Bennett, W. L. (1978). Storytelling in criminal trials: A model of social judgment. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 64*, 1–22.

Bennett, W. L., & Feldman, M. S. (1981). *Reconstructing reality in the courtroom*. London: Tavistock.

Ceci, S. J., & Bruck, M. (1993). The suggestibility of the child witness: A historical review and synthesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 113*, 403–439.

Ceci, S. J., Crossman, A. M., Scullin, M. H., Gilstrap, L., & Huffman, M. L. (2002). Children's suggestibility research: Implications for the courtroom and the forensic interview. In H. L. Westcott, G. M. Davies, & R. H. C. Bull. (Eds.), *Children's testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice* (pp. 117–130). Chichester: Wiley.

Davies, G., Wilson, C., Mitchell, R., & Milsom, J. (1995). *Videotaping children's evidence: An evaluation*. London: Home Office.

Davies, G. M., Westcott, H. L., & Horan, N. (2000). The impact of questioning style on the content of investigative interviews with suspected child sexual abuse victims. *Psychology, Crime & Law, 6*, 81–97.

Davis, G., Hoyano, L., Keenan, C., Maitland, L., & Morgan, R. (1999). *An assessment of the admissibility and sufficiency of evidence in child abuse prosecutions*. London: Home Office.

Fisher, R. P., & Geiselman, R. E. (1992). *Memory-enhancing techniques for investigative interviewing: The cognitive interview*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Friedman, W. J. (1990). *About time: Inventing the fourth dimension*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Friedman, W. J. (1991). The development of children's memory for the time of past events. *Child Development, 62*, 139–155.

Henderson, E. (2002). Persuading and controlling: The theory of cross-examination in relation to children. In H. L. Westcott, G. M. Davies, & R. H. C. Bull. (Eds.), *Children's testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice* (pp. 279–293). Chichester: Wiley.

Home Office in conjunction with the Department of Health. (1992). *Memorandum of good practice on video recorded interviews with child witnesses for criminal proceedings*. London: HMSO.

Home Office. (2002) *Achieving best evidence in criminal proceedings: Guidance for vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, including children*. London: Home Office Communication Directorate.

Kendall-Tackett K. A., Williams, L. M., & Finkelhor D. (1993). Impact of sexual abuse on children: A review and synthesis of recent empirical studies. *Psychological Bulletin, 113*, 164–180.

Poole, D. A., & Lamb, M. E. (1998). *Investigative interviews of children. A guide for helping professionals*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Powell, M., & Thomson, D. (2002). Children's memories for repeated events. In H. L. Westcott, G. M. Davies, & R. H. C. Bull, (Eds.), *Children's testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice* (pp. 69–82). Chichester: Wiley.

Saywitz, K. J. (2002). Developmental underpinnings of children's testimony. In H. L. Westcott, G. M. Davies, & R. H. C. Bull, (Eds.), *Children's testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice* (pp. 3–19). Chichester: Wiley.

Saywitz, K. J., Goodman, G. S., Nicholas, E., & Moan, S. (1991). Children's memories of a physical examination involving genital touch: Implications for reports of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 59*, 682–691.

Stein, N. L., & Nezworski, T. (1978). The effects of organization and instructional set on story memory. *Discourse Processes, 1*, 177–193.

Sternberg, K. J., Lamb, M. E., Davies, G. M., & Westcott, H. L. (2001). The Memorandum of Good Practice: Theory versus application. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 25*, 669–681.

Vrij, A. (2000). *Detecting lies and deceit: Psychology of lying and the implications for professional practice*. Chichester: Wiley.

Vrij, A. (2002) Deception in children: A literature review and implications for children's testimony. In H. L. Westcott, G. M. Davies, & R. H. C. Bull, (Eds.), *Children's testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice* (pp. 175–194). Chichester: Wiley.

Wade, A., Lawson, A., & Aldridge, J. (1998). Stories in court – video-taped interviews and the production of children's testimony. *Child and Family Law Quarterly, 10*, 179–189.

Wade, A., & Westcott, H. L. (1997). No easy answers: Children's perspectives on investigative interviews. In H. L. Westcott, & J. Jones, (Eds.) *Perspectives on the Memorandum: Policy, practice and research in investigative interviewing* (pp. 51–65). Aldershot: Arena.

Walker, A. G., & Warren, A. R. (1995). The language of the child abuse interview: Asking the questions, understanding the answers. In T. Ney (Ed.), *True and false allegations of child sexual abuse: Assessment and management* (pp. 153–162). New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Warren, A. R., Woodall, C. E., Thomas, M., Nunno, M., Keeney, J. M., Larson, S. M. & Stadfeld, J. A. (1999). Assessing the effectiveness of a training program for interviewing child witnesses. *Applied Developmental Science, 3*, 128–135.

Wattam, C. (1992). *Making a case in child protection*. Harlow: Longman.

Westcott, H. L., Davies, G. M., & Bull, R. H. C. (Eds.) (2002) *Children's testimony: A handbook of psychological research and forensic practice*. Chichester: Wiley.

Westcott, H. L., Davies, G. M., & Spencer, J. R. (1999). Children, hearsay and the courts: A perspective from the United Kingdom. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 5*, 282–303.

Wilson, C., & Powell, M. (2001). *A guide to interviewing children. essential skills for counsellors, police, lawyers and social workers*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Wood, J. M., McClure, K. A., & Birch, R. A. (1996). Suggestions for improving interviews in child protection agencies. *Child Maltreatment, 1*, 223–230.

Received 5 August 2002; revised version received 27 March 2003