

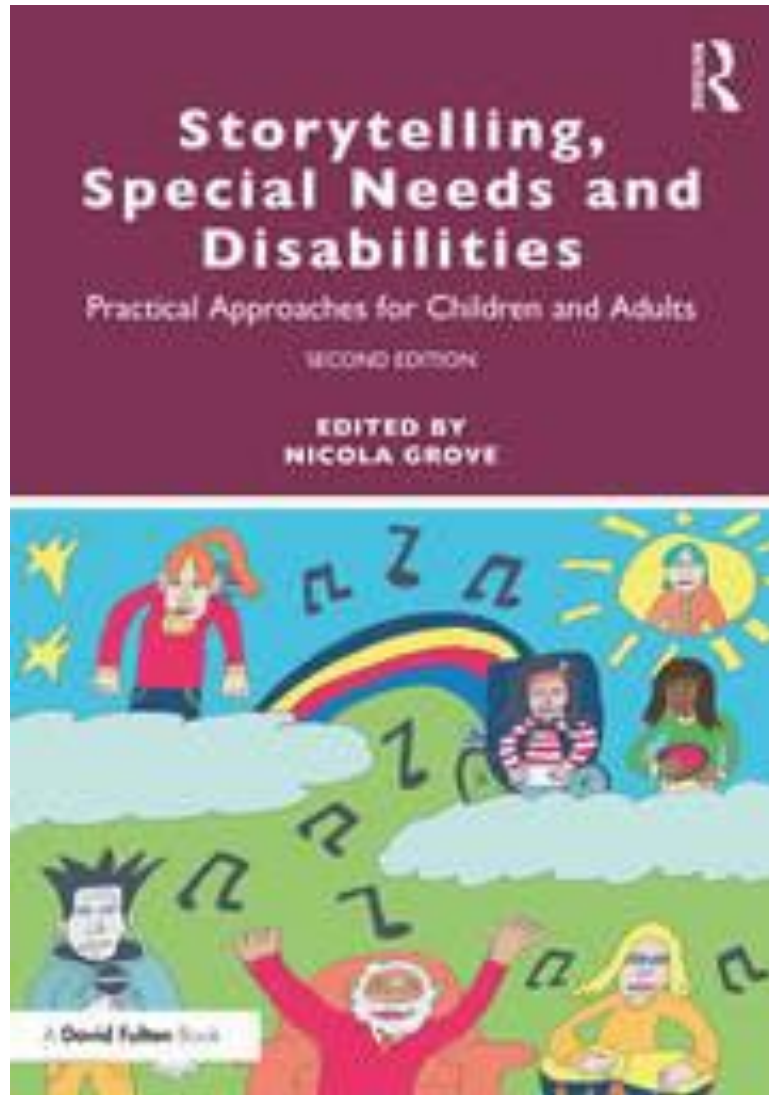
Berätta mer – Tell me more....
Communications Carnival Gothenburg
11-12 November 2025

Nicola Grove

Rix Inclusive Research
University of East London

Tell Me, Tell Us, Tell
Them...Part 1 Personal
Stories & AAC

I'd like to mention....



- 16: Describing and Evaluating the Storytelling Experience: A Conceptual Framework - *Tuula Pulli*
- 17: Sensitive Stories: Tackling Challenges for People with Profound Intellectual Disabilities Through Multi-Sensory Storytelling - *Loretto Lambe & colleagues PAMIS*
- 18: Social Stories™ - *Carol Gray*
- 19: Storysharing® Personal Narratives for Identity and Community - *Nicola Grove and Jane Harwood*
- 20: Personal Storytelling with Deaf Blind Individuals - *Gunnar Vege and Anne Nafstadt*
- 21: Personal Storytelling for Children who use AAC - *Annalu Waller and Rolf Black*
- 22: Self-created Film & AAC Technology for Daily Storytelling - *Mascha Legel and Chris Norrie*
- 24: The Autistic Storyteller: Sharing the Experience of Otherness - *Justine de Mierre*
- 25: Tales from the Heart: Testimony from Storytellers with Learning Disabilities - *Sayaka Kobayashi, The Arts end of Somewhere, and Openstorytellers*

What stories do for us

FRIENDS



WHO WE ARE



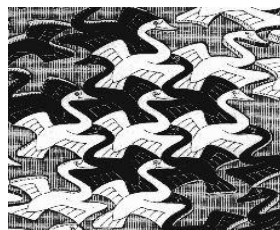
EMPATHY



SOCIAL CHANGE



MAKING SENSE



POSSIBILITIES

Narrative and development

Literacy and educational achievement

McCabe, 2008 (review); Hulme & Snowling, 2009

Memory

Nelson, 2004, Hoerl, 2007

Attachment & social-emotional development

Boudreau, 2008; Killick & Thomas, 2010; Mello, 2001; Fivush, 2011

Identity

Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Baumann, 1996; McAdams, 1993

Personal stories

- Majority of everyday conversation is made up of stories and gossip *Cheepen, 1988 Hsu, 2008 (claims 65%)*,
- More prevalent than fictional in 5-6 year old conversations (only 4% fictional) *Preece 1987*
- Interactions of five 11 year olds with adult, peer and younger child dominated by personal narratives *Ghezi et. al., 1987*
- Children produce better story structure in personal than fictional contexts *Peterson et al. 1999*

more likely to be useful on a daily basis in social interactions McCabe et al., 2008

Personal Narratives & AAC Technology

- One of the reasons for the lack of extended conversation is that design of most augmentative communication systems focus on the communication of needs and wants.
- The ability to engage in more complex types of communication, including the sharing of personal narrative, seldom develops in people who have grown up using AAC; the operational construction of narrative discourse is prohibitively slow and physically exhausting and without the experience and technological support to construct and use narrative pragmatically, the ability and desire to extend conversation remains elusive
- Some users of AAC technology do share personal experience, but this often occurs by giving a key word to a skilled partner who then co-constructs the story with the nonspeaking partner (Waller, 2019)

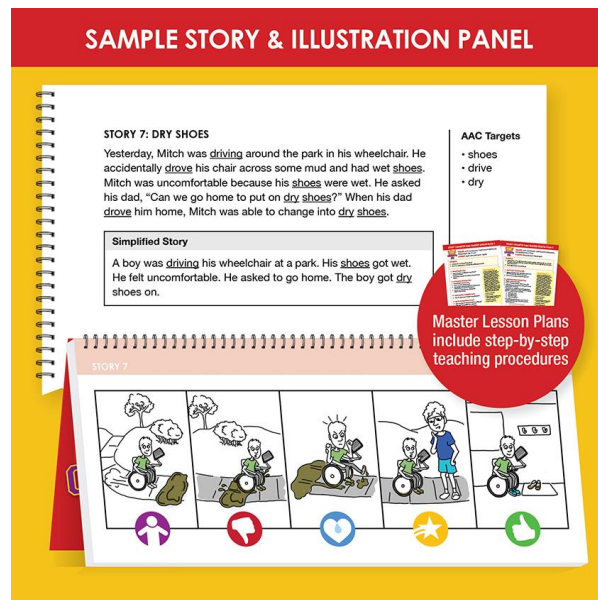
....use of child-centered co-construction strategies, including elicitation, question asking, prompts, positive praise, repetitions, and modeling of vocabulary and grammar, might be a facilitative factor in supporting the personal narratives of children who use AAC.
(Solomon Rice & Soto, 2010)

Definitions and models for Personal Narrative

Definitions

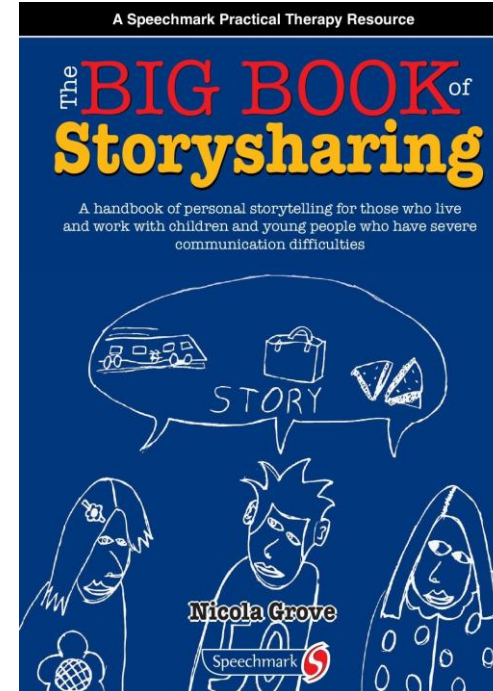
A narrative is a monologic telling or retelling (regardless of modality or form) of a specific past event (real or fantasy) with causal and temporal cohesion

Almubark, Spencer & Forster 2025



A personal story is a recounting of a specific reportable experience that has meaning for teller and listener

2 dimensions: referential & evaluative Labov & Waletzky 1967



Small stories – embedded in talk..the ones we tell each other in passing; the real stories of our lived lives
Bamberg & Georgopoulou, 2008

Models of narrative development

• Cognitive emphasis

- Fictional, literacy focus
- Intrapersonal origin
(*within individual*)
- Emphasis on structure
- Told as monologue
- Mature telling not till c. 5y
Stein & Glenn, Applebee, Westby

Story grammar

Setting – time, place; Characters
Initiating problem; Goal; Attempts
Resolution;

• Social emphasis

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

Narrative development

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

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



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



5y
Causality
Time, *who, when why*



6-7y
Structured
Complete episodes, connectives, diversions



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

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

Research findings

Children who use aided communication

- Few stories told
- Limited coherence & cohesion
- Topic maintenance a strength
- Impoverished language
- Rely on co-construction: partners may not provide opportunities to use narrative features
- Independent narration challenging

- Waller, 2013, Waller & Black, 2022; Soto 2006, 2009, 2010

Signers

- Narratives of 10 children with cognitive disabilities who used manual signs as their primary means of expression.
- Most produced one or two sign utterances , longer utterances strung lexical constituents together.
- Not coherent or cohesive - did not explicitly mark the agent, the patient, the relationship between the characters or the temporal order of events
- Reliant on support from communicative partner (teacher)
- We hypothesise this is due in part to limited sign input – the children hear spoken language with key words coded into sign, but what they see are single signs with long gaps between them...modelling is inadequate for their learning
- Grove & Tucker, 2002; Grove, 2019

ASSESSMENT

FORMAL ASSESSMENT

- NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT PROFILE (NAP)
- Lifespan approach
- Can be used cross culturally
- Across disabilities

- Assesses: topic maintenance, event sequencing, explicitness, referencing, conjunctive cohesion, and fluency
- <https://practicalaac.org/strategy/narrative-assessment-and-people-who-use-aac/>

ASSESSMENT TASKS

- –designed to elicit different narrative features – results combined to provide a comprehensive picture (Soto, 2006)
- Personal photo description
- Shared reading – story retell
- Wordless picture book narrate the story
- Story stem (*Once there was a boy who lived in a zoo..tell us what happened..*)
- Personal event narrative (*tell me about something that just happened....*)

NARRATIVE DIMENSIONS (van der Mieroop, 2021)

THE NARRATOR

- **Ownership** (from non-personal/vicarious experience/ undefined ownership to personal and shared experience)
- **Authorship** (from speaking in one's own name, speaking on behalf of oneself & others to speaking about others & assuming a generalized perspective)
- **Tellership** (from a single teller to various forms of collaborative tellership)

THE NARRATED EVENTS

- **Frequency** (from events that have not or may not have happened/ happen to single, unique events to multiple & generalized events)
- **Time** (from past to present & future to temporally undefined)
- **Evaluation** (from no evaluation, over medium to high evaluation)

INTERVENTIONS

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

- Children develop narrative memory through talking about experience (Nelson, 1991)
- Parental scaffolding supports narrative development (McCabe & Peterson, 1999; Miller & Sperry, 1988)
- Stories are built around reportable events and the feelings they evoke (Labov & Waletzky, 1967)
- Personal stories are easier to construct, and emerge earlier in development than fictional stories (Allen et. al., 1994; Hudson & Shapiro, 1991; McCabe et. al., 2008)
- Anecdotal narratives are often told collaboratively (Norrick, 2000)
- Personal stories are told in very culturally specific ways (McCabe & Bliss, 2003)

Goals of intervention in AAC

- Linguistic complexity – more vocabulary, longer, more complex constructions
- Story complexity – more story grammar elements/ more episodes, high points, evaluations
- Structured approaches using story stems, story games (eg *Never Ending Stories* board game; story templates, story stems) Soto, 2006, 2009
- Technology solutions eg. *How was school today?*
- Some evidence from small samples that individuals benefit in the short term...?? Generalisation

Narrative intervention using devices with children with autism (Almubark, Spencer & Forster 2025)

- 3 children (Austin 6, Carson 7, David 10) “minimally verbal” (A with global developmental delay)
- Targeted story grammar components using adapted “Story Champs” framework: graduated prompting of story retelling
<https://languagedynamicsgroup.com/story-champs-about/>
- Austin & Carson improved story grammar skills; all increased multi-symbol use

Parent logs

- Austin

Increased vocalization and interest & pleasure in using the device

- Carson

Mother “never uses the device” but C spontaneously used it more, expressed wants and needs and SLP reported more multi-symbol utterances

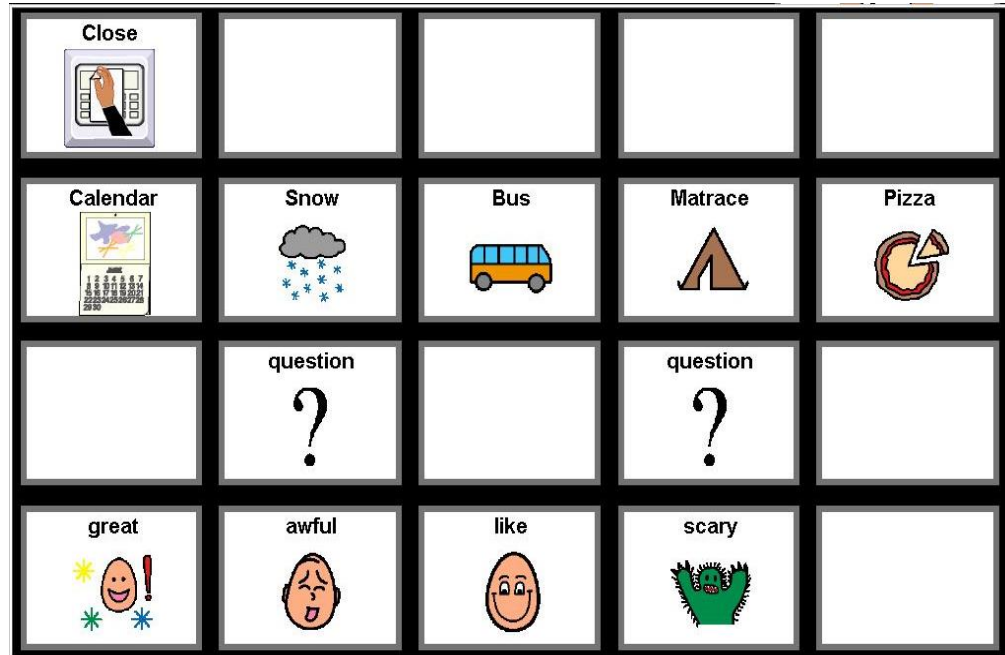
- David

Used more sentences, started telling personal stories

Storytelling with devices

- Recalling and retrieving relevant vocabulary
- Preparation & organization needed
- Can easily revert to Q and A /yes/no– many “Hint-Guess” exchanges
- Stored stories – be careful not to use single press; short sequences to allow for interaction and suspense
- Communication is multimodal – vocal and body affect to express feelings; actions may be body movement, gesture, sign
- Need to store and retrieve stories for re-telling...
- Keep the device/book on hand all the time
- 200 opportunities per day needed for fluent use
- Make sure to model
- <https://praacticalaac.org/strategy/personal-narratives-aac/>

HOW WAS SCHOOL TODAY?...Annalu Waller & colleagues



The questionmark buttons allow the narrator to ask ? The bottom row is reserved for generic evaluations, Additional buttons are provided for yes/no responses. A 'Next' button was introduced to allow the telling of the story step-by-step.

Calendar = *This was in December 2010.*

Snow = *We had so much snow. The school was really struggling.*

Bus = *There was even so much snow that the buses would come to pick us up!*

Camp = *I and some of my friends had to stay at the school overnight!*

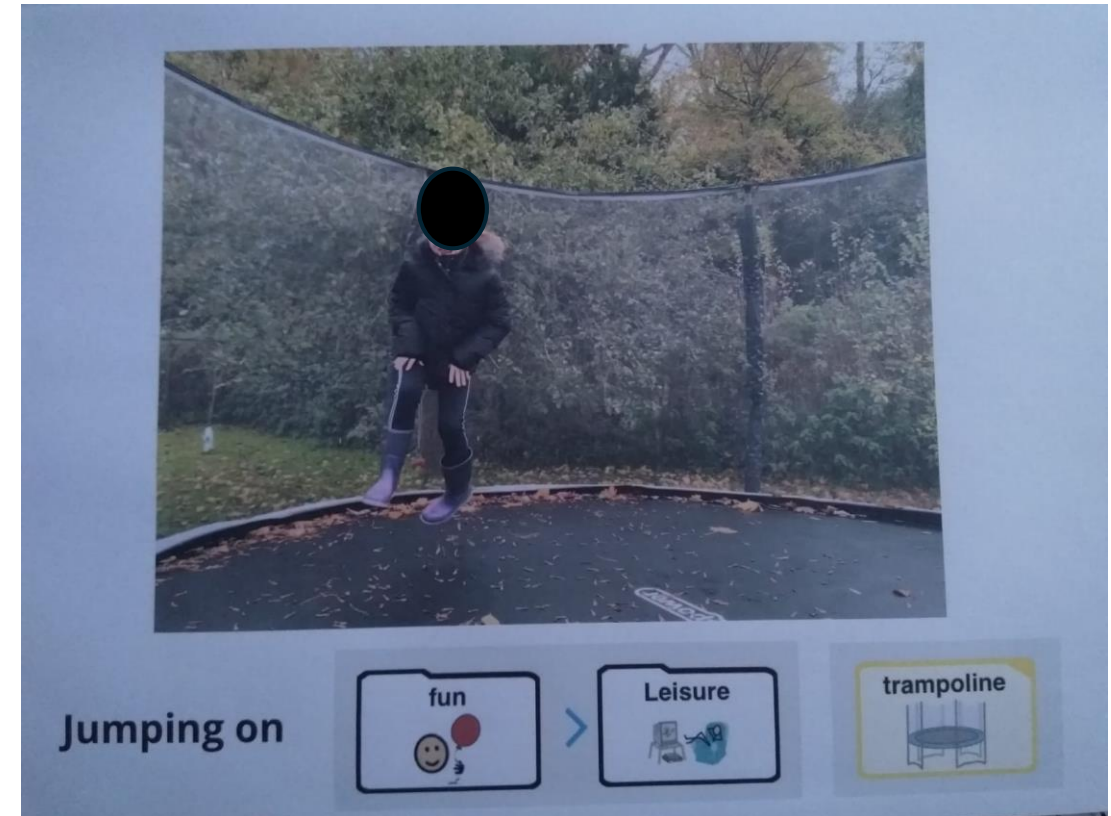
Pizza = *The teachers drove to ASDA to get medicine and a pizza.*

Waller & Black 2022

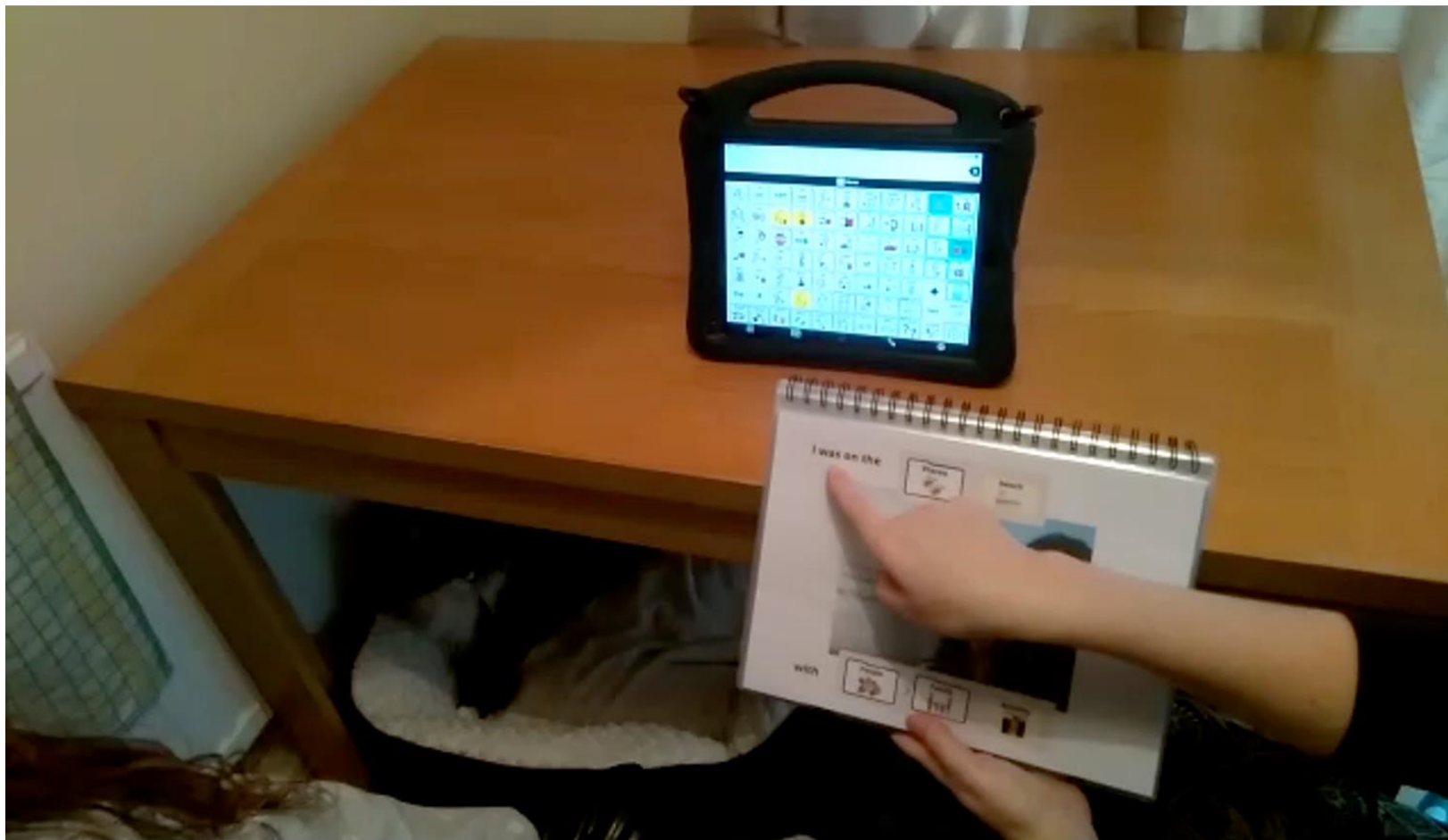
'How was School Today' provides the pragmatic structure to introduce a narrative, control the pace of delivery and respond to partner interactions. A sequence of simple sentences are generated by the system and presented to the user as a 'story'.

Getting started with a storybook

- Combine photos and Proloquo symbols
- At first, 5 photos, single word or navigation picture “jumping on...” for each
- Use some familiar words and some new vocabulary
- Simple languages with sentences she can complete



Linking storybook to AAC Device



Ashleigh Paddon, Jitka Jacobkova *Storysharing with AAC* webinar 2021

Sharing stories using self created film

(Legel et. al., 2025)

- Step 1 Find and film the experience – Story collection
- Step 2 Edit the film
- Step 3 Share the story



Storytelling with sign and gesture (Grove 1995)

Narrative task 1: Watch a short video dramatic story with Nicola
Immediately retell to your teacher

Narrative task 2 With your teacher, tell Nicola about
something that has happened recently

ALL CHILDREN IN THE STUDY WERE ABLE TO CARRY OUT THESE TASKS

Narratives...

- Long sign strings with no evidence of internal structure (syntax) could made it difficult to work out what was happening
- Creative modifications to signs provided detail about events
- Providing interesting stimulus with imaginative detail – encourages creativity in language...
- Reanalysis of data in 2019 led to unexpected findings

Using points – referencing space and time

Aisha

A. HELP

T. *Yes you said HELP ILL. What was the matter with {-R -Raheem} ILL*

A. {pt. forward left down fit}

T. *He was having a fit wasn't he?*

Jonathan

.
(Rh). pt, up—————(takes Tshrdwith his left hand moves up) “ooh” (hand to mouth)
23.56 T. *you went on the canal didn't you? yes on the top bunk.*

Louise

06.10 T. *what did we do at school on {W Wednesday}?*

06.12 L. WEDNESDAY pt.(forward “outside”)—————(06.16)

06.13 T. *when we were at school on Wednesday we didn't go out*

Using points – changing the topic

10.30 T. *were you being* {BAD *naughty*}? *were you being* {GOOD *good*}

10.35 J. (headshake=no) GOOD

10.38 J. {-B- pt. (forward =“there”) *Ann Ba Ann* }

T. {WHAT *what's that*}

10.42 J. {COOK pt.(forward) WORK# pt. (forward right) WORK#
pt.(right) pt.-ME WORK WORK— WRITE ## PLAY PLAY *cook work*
me me work work}

10.49 T. WORK WRITE

10.53.T. {PLAY *play yes*}

Dyspraxic signers “hold the floor”

Dyspraxic signers sign for longer – difficult to inhibit and stop movement.
BUT - reanalysis showed that actually this meant they were able to maintain their turns.

Teachers talked at the same time as the kids were signing, but the kids were keeping
going!

So they were able to hold their own in conversation.

Examples:

Extract 13. Adam

56.50 A. BOY GIVE DINNER GIRL BOY GIVE CAKE (LH ———) Rh EAT CAKE// ———SANDWICH
—————(headshake) SANDWICH 57.17

57.02 T. *Has mummy made a cake?*

Extract 14. Louise

5.51 T. *Who have I got at home?*

5.53 L. -B-#-#——pt. there —— (5.57) (turns to look as teacher speaks)

T. *My Becky yes, like the dog here, yes.*

Extract 15. Susie

50.17 T. {WHERE DAD LAST WEEK *where was Daddy last week?*}

50.18 S. DAD—WAIT—CAR#———(50.28)

T. {WAIT *waiting*} {WHERE *where*}? 50.23 T. *in the* {CAR *car*}?

Talking about the past: embed as social practice

- Talk about what has *just happened* – immediate past
 - "Plenary talk" – what we did together this session
 - End of day talk – what we did today
 - End of week talk – what were the stories to remember from this week?
 - Assembly and important celebrations
 - Collect the stories that tell who we are
-
- Send information home to families
 - Collect stories from families to share

Conclusions

- Challenge ou deficit mind set...
- Adopt a flexible approach – which model is appropriate for which individuals, in which contexts?
- Always consider narrative dimensions
- Always consider multimodality
- Success with narrative depends not only on the skills of the individual, but on
 - The range of semiotic esources available to them
 - Motivation to tell (purpose)
 - The quality of the experiences they encounter
 - The affordances and constraints of technologies
 - The audience
 - Provision of opportunities

THANKS FOR LISTENING

Annalu Waller & Rolf Black; Ashleigh Paddon & Jitka Jacobkova; Mascha Legel

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