



A DESCRIPTION OF SELF-GENERATED NARRATIVES FROM AFRICAN AMERICAN PRESCHOOLERS

Mia Kimmons, MS

University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH, USA

Amy Wait Hobek, PhD

University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH, USA

— ABSTRACT —

This study examined macrostructure characteristics of spoken narrative production from self-generated narratives of African American (AA) preschool children as analyzed by the Index of Narrative Complexity (INC; Peterson et al., 2008). Twenty-six children who were enrolled in two full-day Head Start classrooms in a single Head Start building participated in this study. Narratives samples from a prior study were used from an intervention study in which children created picture books and told them to a researcher. The narratives of the children from the control group who did not receive the intervention were collected and analyzed for narrative characteristics. Higher narrative element scores and increased density of narrative elements were noted as indicated by the Index of Narrative Complexity (INC; Peterson et al., 2008) as age groups increased. The results from the current study supports the notion that self-generated narratives may provide children with an opportunity to generate narrative elements independently. Self-generated narratives of AA children may supply a sound context for involving cultural as well as linguistic behaviors that provide less rigidity to storytelling.

KEY WORDS: narrative, assessment, African American English, preschool

INTRODUCTION

Research exploring self-generated narratives of preschool African American (AA) children is limited. Although there have been many studies providing information about typical narrative production in European American (EA) children, few studies provide information about AA preschoolers' spoken narrative production (Curenton & Justice, 2004; Price, Roberts, & Jackson, 2006; Terry, Mills, Bingham, Mansour & Marencin, 2013) story literary technique (SLT). In addition, spoken narratives abilities in preschool children have been found to predict later language and literacy success (Griffin, Hemphill, Camp, & Wolf, 2004). This is especially important to culturally and linguistically diverse populations such as AA preschoolers who have been considered "at risk" for academic challenges. Furthermore, it has been noted that AA narratives do not necessarily represent the narratives of the classroom and are often judged based on narratives produced by EA children—whose narratives reflect those found in the classroom (Champion, Seymour, & Camarata, 1995; Michaels, 1981). Without a strong understanding of AA spoken narratives, prejudice within educational programming may occur when the favored discourse of the classroom has not been adopted.

Therefore, more research is necessary to properly assess and identify typical versus disordered narrative characteristics within the AA preschool population and to inform culturally and linguistically appropriate practices in the preschool setting. Furthermore, understanding what is culturally and linguistically appropriate for AA preschoolers may support teaching practices in academic settings where this population is considered to be "at-risk" (Hughes, McGillivray, & Schmidek, 1997; Mills, Watkins, & Washington, 2013).

One of the many ways to assess language is through obtaining a narrative sample. Spoken narrative assessment is one tool recommended in the research literature to evaluate language skills of individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse populations such as AA children because of the reduction in test bias that exists when comparing them to standardized assessment measures (Schraeder, Quinn, Stockman, & Miller, 1999). Professionals such as speech-language pathologists (SLPs) use spoken narratives as assessment and intervention tools because of the developmental relationship between storytelling and language skills (Hughes et al., 1997).

Although both story retell and story generation tasks have been considered appropriate methods for eliciting spoken narratives, story retells in children are investigated more frequently (Merritt & Liles,

1987; 1989). However, story generation may provide a better representation of the AA preschool children's language abilities in a more relaxed, and limitless format within the child's cultural realm of storytelling (Champion, 1995; Merritt & Liles, 1987, 1989; Hughes et al., 1997).

The purpose of this current study is to examine narrative characteristics via story grammar features of AA preschoolers when assessing self-generated narratives. This information may assist with assessment, intervention, and educational programming for children in the preschool setting. In addition, it may provide professionals such as speech-language pathologists with access to more information about cultural and linguistic variations found within the spoken narratives of AA preschoolers.

Assessing Narrative Macrostructure and Story Grammar

Professionals such as speech-language pathologists, researchers, and education specialists assess narratives because they provide a plethora of information regarding cognitive and language abilities. The information obtained from narrative assessments can predict later language and literacy skills in young children (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Griffin et al., 2004; Hughes et al., 1997). Included in the assessment of narratives is the analysis of macrostructure. When professionals assess macrostructure of narratives, they often examine the child's ability to remember and understand material presented in a chronological and cohesive order. Macrostructure analysis includes a method of evaluating the inclusion of story grammar elements. Stein and Glenn (1979) identified story grammar elements that have been used by researchers to take a chronological approach to narrative analysis using story grammars in clinical practice (Schneider & Dubé, 2005; Soodla & Kikas, 2010). These elements include setting, initiating event or problem, internal response, internal plan, attempt, consequence, resolution or reaction, and ending (Hughes, et al, 1997). Schneider and Dubé (2005) discussed the two major components of a story grammar model which include structural pattern and story grammar elements. These researchers defined a complete structural pattern as those containing an initiating event, attempt, and an outcome.

One purpose for macrostructure analysis is to understand a child's ability to comprehend, organize, and use language. Narrative macrostructure analysis can be evaluated once elicited using visual and/or auditory stimuli such as pictures and verbal prompts and/or personal experiences (Hughes et al, 1997). Macrostructure analysis can also be used to determine which story grammar elements are present or

absent within a child's fictional narrative production based on story structure level judgment.

Clinical research evaluating EA preschoolers indicates that prior to story structure level achievement, preschoolers are typically able to produce scripts from familiar activities. Next, they participate and eventually move to what is known as *descriptive sequences*. Descriptive sequences include describing what characters are doing or what they will do without an actual cause for the action. Specific grammar elements used at the preschool age within the *descriptive sequence* level may include characters, settings, and customary actions without causal relations. Following these initial abilities, young children use the structure *action sequence* level which can be described as sequences that list actions in chronological order without causal order. Specific grammar elements used at the preschool age within the *action sequence* level may include actions and attempts that occur chronologically but without a causal order. Finally, young children use the structure *reactive sequence* which are described as a list of linked actions that have no plan nor clear objectives. Specific grammar elements used at the preschool age within the *reactive sequence* may include actions and attempts which involuntarily cause other actions and attempts but lack planning or goals for actions and attempts (Hughes et al., 1997; Table 4.3 p. 121; McCabe and Rollins, 1994). It is not until around age eight years old when a complete episode for generated stories becomes evident. At this time goals for a complete episode, which includes an initiating event, an action, a direct consequence for an action, are obvious and efforts to solve the problem are made clear (Hughes et al., 1997; p. 123).

With an understanding of narrative assessment and macrostructure development within the young EA population, professionals are able to compare and contrast differences that may or may not exist within the narrative development of minority groups such as AA children. The following paragraphs will attempt to provide information about what was previously reported and what is currently known about AA narrative development.

African American Narratives

AA children are capable of proficient narrative production as well as developing these abilities at a comparable rate to that of EA children (Burns, De Villiers, & Peterson, 2012; Curenton & Justice, 2004). Additionally, AA culture impacts narrative development in preschool children and includes communication forms that vary from EA narrative development (Champion et. al, 1999).

Professionals must be aware of the impact of home language cultural differences between EA and AA narrative development to offer a better representation of AA children within academic settings (Champion et. al, 1999; Stockman, 2010). However, few studies have investigated AA narrative abilities beyond comparing them to EA children's narrative production. More research is needed to examine the narrative skills within the AA population to identify what can be seen as typical development. It is important to determine what can be typically noted within narratives and cultural practices in storytelling of AA preschool children to combat the likelihood of cultural and linguistic mismatch. Cultural and linguistic mismatch may result in misidentification of children from this population. For example, in a study of AA children's macrostructural narrative production, Champion (2001) concluded that AA children produce a repertoire of narrative skills that vary from those of EA children due to the incorporated West African forms of storytelling. These narratives include content that reflect social language behaviors found within the West African culture that may not be reflected within that of the EA dialect. This content includes performance, moral centered, and dispute narratives which support the fact that culture variations should be considered when assessing AA narratives.

Other studies of AA preschoolers examined the development of narrative macrostructure within the population (McGregor, 2000; Champion, 2003; Price et al., 2006). For example, in a study conducted by Price et al. (2006), the structural development of 65 AA preschoolers at age four were assessed prior to kindergarten. These researchers found that four-year-old narrative tasks included story grammar elements such as main characters, attempts, initiating events and endings. In addition, the researcher found that before kindergarten, the development of AA preschool narratives macrostructure skills was consistent with those of EA preschoolers. Additionally, as AA children increased in age from four years old to kindergarten entry their narratives contained an increase in elements such as characters, initiating events, internal responses, attempts and endings. As AA children's narrative skills develop from early to later preschool years, these children learn to produce a variety of narrative types and these narratives contain elements that are comparable to that of EA preschoolers (Price et al, 2006).

In short, research has shown that differences and similarities exist within the narratives of AA children that require more identification. Our study seeks to describe the variety of macrostructure of narrative production that can be found within AA preschool

children. We seek to offer a more comprehensive view of what these children bring to the academic setting that represents their cultural and linguistic abilities.

Story Retells and Story Generation

Both story generation and story retells have been considered effective methods for narrative elicitation because they provide a description of language use in connected discourse. However, when given the opportunity to create a story, a true representation of narrative skills, may allow researchers to assess more authentic story telling skills. Lever & Senechal (2011) noted that children learn how to construct a story early in their language development and may demonstrate the ability to construct stories that more accurately assesses language and narrative abilities than a story retell. Although story retells may be more easily evaluated, story retells may limit the narrative assessment process to memorizing and restating story components without actually addressing the child's ability to produce language to determine what interventions may be necessary (Griffin et al, 2004; Lever and Senechal, 2011).

Self-generated narratives may allow children to access specific cultural and linguistic storytelling methods that they may not be able to use when retelling stories that are pre-determined and reflective of EA cultural storytelling practices. This more open-ended story telling structure, may provide AA children the opportunity to produce narratives during narrative assessments that give more cultural and linguistic flexibility in storytelling modality.

In summary, few studies have examined the narrative development of AA preschool children. A description of story components noted in the self-generated narratives from AA preschoolers may provide a more holistic view of narrative development. Examining AA preschool narratives will help to describe language abilities, cultural and linguistic differences, and highlight what features are generally noted within the macrostructural components of self-generated narratives. By making these observations, it may provide clinicians with an awareness of differences as well as similarities of self-generated narratives when narrative samples are collected and analyzed. An understanding of this population's narrative abilities may reduce the misidentification which may be found when there is a mismatch in what is expected within the academic setting. To this end, the current study sought to answer the following question:

What are the macrostructure narrative language characteristics present in self-generated narratives produced by typically developing African American preschool children, as analyzed by the INC (Peters-

en et al., 2008), during a storybook writing activity within the early preschool classroom setting?

METHODS

Participants

Data were extracted from an original study which investigated a language-based approach to early writing (Hobek, 2014). During this study, an experimental group of children created their own picture books and narrated their self-generated stories to a researcher after the completion of their books over a five-month intervention period. For the purposes of the current study, the narratives of the control group of children from the original study, who did not receive the picture book writing intervention, were analyzed for developmental narrative characteristics. This control group of children produced self-generated narratives through creating and retelling picture books (see below) for a pre- and post-elicitation only. This occurred once in both January and in May.

The narratives of twenty-six African American (AA) children from the sample group, who had been enrolled in two full-day Head Start classrooms located in a single Head Start, were analyzed for this study. This program was located in a mid-sized city in the Midwest. The participants were from low income homes as determined by their qualified enrollment in a federally funded Head Start program for children living in poverty. The sample consisted of 13 boys and 13 girls ranging from 3 years, 3 months to five years, 1 month at the time of enrollment in the study. The participants were not receiving speech, language, or other educational services documented by an Individual Education Plan (IEP). All participants completed and passed Head Start mandated screenings, including speech, language, and hearing, as documented by the Head Start center.

Procedures

Eliciting Narratives. Data were collected at two different times, January and April, self-generated narratives were collected from the sample of children to compare to pre- and post-narratives from the experimental group. The following information indicates the procedures of narrative elicitation for this sample group during the original study. During these two data collection times, the children created picture books during structured writing times in the classroom. Each session was approximately 30 minutes long, which was determined by the children's decisions regarding how long they wanted to work to complete their books. The classroom teacher and a speech-language pathologist (SLP) provided indi-

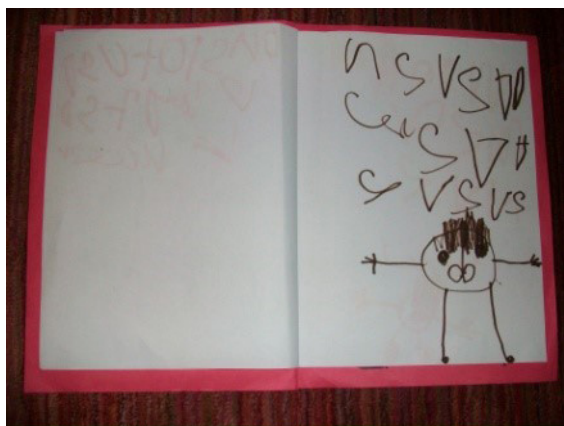
vidual support and developmentally appropriate instruction (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) to guide the children to focus on the following areas: topic generation, drawing pictures, writing a message to go along with the pictures, and developing the spoken narrative of their stories.

The teacher and SLP mediated both writing forms and developing stories through side-by-side interactions with children. They began each session moving around the classroom, sitting at the table next to the children, and asking starter questions such as “What are you going to write about today?” and “What is your story going to be about?”. Throughout the process of creating the books, the teacher and SLP continued moving around the classroom and sitting next to the children with the additional prompts such as “Tell me about your story”, “what is going to happen next?”. After finishing their stories, the children were encouraged to share them with either the teacher or SLP. The books were collected after the story creation setting and children were then asked to come into a quiet room and tell the researcher their story.

Data Collection

The children were audio recorded when they told their story to the researcher. The researcher used the prompt: “Tell me your story” and used follow-up prompts to encourage the children to tell the story. As the children were telling their stories from the book, the researcher encouraged them to continue by providing responses such as “Uh-huh” or repeating what the children said. According to Peterson and McCabe (1983), such responses encourage children to continue their spoken narratives without giving them cues regarding expectations of the narrative structure. See figure 1 for a sample product collected after the intervention session.

Figure 1. Sample of child's writing and spoken narrative collected for data analysis. E= the examiner's response and C= the child's response.



Data Analysis

The audio-recordings of the children's stories were transcribed and scored for analysis of spoken narrative macrostructure elements using the Index of Narrative Complexity (INC) (Petersen, et al., 2008). The INC (Peterson et al., 2008) was used to code data for the dependent variables. INC categories are weighted based on a narrative's complexity as well as its cohesion. The weight of each element as well as its importance is based on academic EA narrative styles (Peterson et al., 2008). The INC includes categories for measuring complexity such as characters, setting, initiating events, internal responses, plans, action/attempts, complications, consequences, narrator evaluations, formulaic markers, temporal markers, and causal adverbial clauses. Narrative elements such as *character*, *initiating events*, *plan*, and *consequence* have the highest possible weights ranging from 0 to 3 points. The remaining narrative elements *setting*, *internal response*, *action/attempt*, *complication*, *narrative evaluation*, and *knowledge of dialogue* have the highest weights ranging from 0 to 2 points. The macrostructure of a narrative includes its overall organizational pattern and its structural characteristics (Hughes et al., 1997). This scoring system was chosen because it allows for identifying incremental changes in the complexity of narrative skills that were useful in determining progress in development over the short duration of this study. A composite score is calculated to reflect the overall complexity of the narrative. According to Petersen et al. (2008), the INC was found to be a tool that can be scored consistently, can be used across varying elicitation formats, and has high correlations with the Test of Narrative Language (Gillam & Pearson, 2004) with good reliability. Although the preliminary

E This is {child26}.
 E January 26th.
 E {Child26} will you tell me about your story?
 C I play.
 E Ok turn<> the pages when you're ready.
 C <I XXX and>
 C And I share with friend/s.
 C And I said, "Would you play with me please?"
 E Ok.
 C They said, "Sure".
 E They said sure?
 C Well I play/ed with them.
 E You play/ed with them?
 C And they want to play with me.
 E And they play/ed with you.
 C The end.
 E Wow that's a great story.
 E Is there anything else you want to tell me about your story?

study was to assess the reliability and validity of this tool included children 6 to 9 years of age, the INC has been used with minimal modifications to demonstrate progress in preschool children's retelling skills as a result of spoken narrative intervention (Spencer & Slocum, 2010).

Reliability

All transcription, coding, and scoring was conducted by the primary investigator and four research assistants. Two research assistants were trained to score the narratives with the Index of Narrative Complexity (INC). They were provided at least four hours of scoring practice narratives. The interrater reliability was 86% for the INC total score for 10% of the narrative transcripts. When disagreement occurred, both coders reviewed the transcripts to determine an agreed-upon score.

RESULTS

The data from the participants were organized into the following age groups for analysis and scoring: 3:0 – 3:5 (n= 6), 3:6 – 3:11 (n=8), 4:0 – 4:5 (n=11), 4:6 – 4:11(n=8), 5:0 – 5:5(n=5). Table 1 displays the number of children and the percent of use for the INC narrative element within the age groups. Figure 2 displays the total mean narrative element scores per age group. The mean composite score increased along with the age ranges. The largest increase occurred between the age groups 3:0 – 3:5 and 3:6 – 3:11. The following sections review the information obtained for each narrative element from the INC.

Character

The mean *character* element scores ranged from 0.5 in 3:0-3:5 year olds to 2.0 in 5:0-5:5 year olds. Thirty-three percent of children age 3:0-3:5 and 100% of children age 4:0 – 4:5 used at least one *character* element. In summary, there was generally an increase in the mean *character* element score and the percentage of children who used at least one *character* element.

Setting

The mean *setting* element scores ranged from 0.75 in 3:6-3:11 year olds to 0.4 in 5:0-5:5 year olds. The percentage of use varied across the age ranges from 62.50% in 3:6 - 3:11 year olds, 45.45% in 4:0 – 4:5 year olds, 62.50% in 4:6 - 4:11 year olds and 40% in 5:0 – 5:5 year olds. In summary, *setting* was not used in 3:0 – 3:5 year olds and there was variation in the means and percentages for children using at least one *setting* element.

Initiating Event

The mean *initiating event* element scores ranged from 0.625 in 3:5-3:11 year olds to 0.6 in 5:0-5:5 year olds. The percentage of use varied across the age ranges from 37.50% to 50.00 % of children using at least one *initiating event* element. In summary, *initiating events* was not represented in 3:0-3:5 year olds. There was variation in the means and an increase in the percentages for children using at least one *initiating event* element.

Internal Response

The mean *internal response* element scores ranged from 0.33 in 3:0-3:5 year olds to 0.2 in 5:0-5:5 year olds. The percent of use varied across the age ranges with 16.67% to 20.00% of children using at least 1 *internal response* element. In summary, *internal responses* was not represented in 4:6 – 4:11 year olds. The means varied among the age groups and the percent of use increased as the age groups increased.

Plan

The mean *plan* element scores ranged from 0.25 in 3:6-3:11 year olds to 0.2 in 5:0-5:5 year olds. The percent of use scores ranged from 12.5% to 27.27% in 3:6 – 3:11 year olds and 5:0 – 5:5 year olds who used at least 1 *plan* element. In summary, *plan* was not represented at the 3:0-3:5 age group and the percent of use increased as the age groups increased.

Action/Attempt

The mean *action/attempt* element scores ranged from 0.16 in 3:0 – 3:5 year olds to 0.67 in 5:0 – 5:5 year olds. The percent of use varied across the age ranges, with 9% to 50.00% of children using at least 1 *action/attempt* element. In summary, *action/attempts* were represented within all age groups. The means and percent of use scores increased as the age groups increased.

Complication

The mean *complication* element score was 0.09 in 4:6 – 4:11 year olds and 0.2 in the 5:0-5:5 year olds. The percent of use score was 9.09% in 4:0 – 4:5 year olds and 20% in 5:0 – 5:5 year olds. In summary, *complication* was not represented in all age groups. The mean scores and percent of use scores increased as the age groups increased.

Consequence

The mean *consequences element score* was 0.25 in 3:6 – 3:11 year olds and 4:6 – 4:11 year olds. The percent of children who used at least 1 narrative element in 3:6-3:11 year olds and 4:6-4:11 year olds was 25% and 12.50% respectively. In summary, *consequences*

was not represented in the all age groups. The mean and percent of use scores were the same in 3:6 – 3:11 year olds and 4:6 – 4:11 year olds.

Narrator Evaluation

The mean *narrator evaluation element score* was 0.25 in 3:6 – 3:11 year olds and 4:6 – 4:11 year olds. The percent of use was the same in 3:6 – 3:11 year olds and 5:0 – 5:5 year olds with 12.50% of children using at least 1 *narrator evaluation* element. In summary, *narrator evaluation* was not represented in all age groups. The mean and percent of use scores were the same in 3:6 – 3:11 year olds and 4:6 – 4:11 year olds.

Knowledge of Dialogue

The mean *knowledge of dialogue* score was 0.12 in 3:6 – 3:11 year olds, 0.18 in 4:0 – 4:5 year olds, 0.38 in 4:6 – 4:11 year olds and 0.17 in 5:0 – 5:5 year olds. The percent of use was 12.50% in 3:6 – 3:11 year olds, 18.18% in 4:0 – 4:5 year olds, 25.00% in 4:6 – 4:11 year olds, and 20.00% in 5:0 – 5:5 year olds who used 1 *knowledge of dialogue* element. In summary,

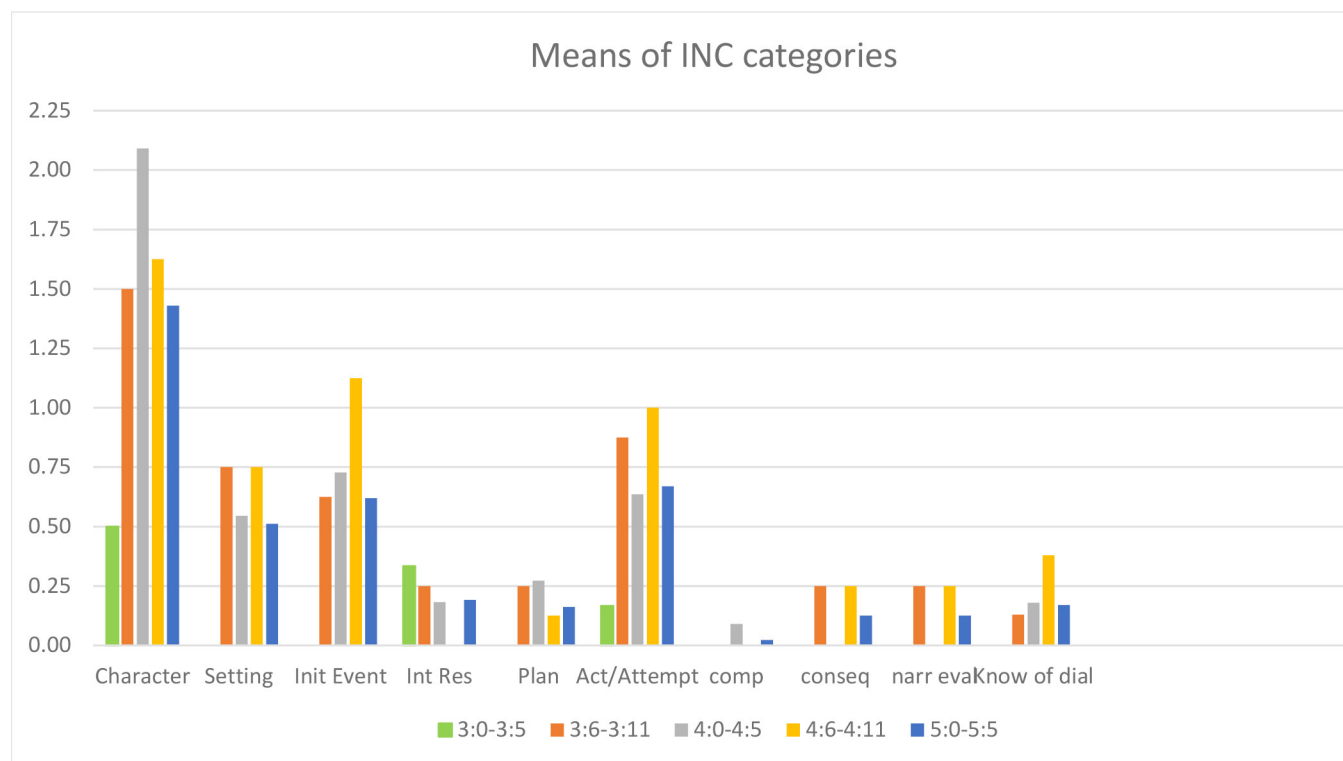
knowledge of dialogue was not represented in 3:0 – 3:5 year olds. The percent of use varied across the age ranges, from 12.50% to 25.00% of children using at least 1 *knowledge of dialogue* element. The mean scores increased in all age groups, however, there was a decrease in 5:0 -5:5 year olds.

Overall, 3:0 - 3:5 year old participants used at least one narrative element within their self-generated story within the categories of *character*, *internal response*, and *action/attempt*. By age 5:5, each narrative element had at least 12.50% usage and increased in density of *characters*, *setting*, *initiating events*, *internal responses*, *plans*, *action/attempts*, *complications*, *consequences*, and *narrator evaluations*. There were narrative elements that appeared to generally increase within the later age ranges such as *character*, *setting*, *action/attempts*, and *knowledge of dialogue*. There were also narrative elements that did not appear to increase with age such as *complication* and *narrator evaluation*. Surprisingly, more narrative element categories, percentage of usage, and intricacy of narratives were found in 4:0 – 4:5 and 4:6 – 4:11 year olds than 5:0 – 5:5 year olds.

Table 1. Number of children using the story grammar element at least once and percent of children who included INC story coding element in their narratives.

	Age Group									
	3:0-3:5		3:6-3:11		4:0-4:5		4:6-4:11		5:0-5:5	
	n(6)	%	n(8)	%	n(11)	%	n(8)	%	n(5)	%
Character	2	33	6	75	11	100	7	87.5	5	100
Setting	0	0	5	62.5	5	45.4	5	62.5	2	40
Initiating Event	0	0	3	37.5	4	36.3	4	50.0	2	40
Internal Response	1	16.6	2	25.0	1	9.0	0	0	1	20
Plan	0	0	2	25.0	3	27.2	1	12.5	1	20
Action/Attempt	1	16.6	4	50.0	5	45.4	4	50.0	3	60
Complication	0	0	0	0	1	9	0	0	1	20
Consequence	0	0	2	25	0	0	1	12.5	0	0
Narrator Evaluation	0	0	1	12.5	0	0	1	12.5	0	0
*KOD	0	0	1	12.5	2	9	2	25.0	1	20

KOD=knowledge of dialogue

Figure 2. Mean INC narrative element score for each age group

DISCUSSION

This study described macrostructure characteristics of retells from self-generated picture books created by AA preschoolers between the ages of 3:0 – 5:5 as evaluated by the INC (Peterson et al., 2008). Our goal was to determine what macrostructure narrative language characteristics were present in self-generated narratives produced by typically developing AA preschool children. Our results were analyzed by the INC (Petersen et al., 2008), during a storybook writing activity within the early preschool classroom setting.

The current study found developmental progression in the mean number of narrative elements as well as the percentages of AA children using macrostructure elements from the ages of 3:0 to 5:5 years old. Changes in narrative development were marked by an increase in numbers of macrostructure elements used, as well as an increase in complexity of the macrostructure elements as our participants matured.

Our results were supported by previous studies showing developmental progression in the macrostructure complexity of preschoolers' spoken narra-

tives (Curenton & Justice, 2004; Khan, Gugiu, Justice, & Bowles, 2016; Price et al., 2006). For example, a study conducted by Khan et al. (2016) examined age-related progressions on individual story-structure components in young children's narratives. The researchers found a developmental trend when analyzing narrative episode-structure (e.g. setting, goal, conventional ending) in children (73% white) from ages 3 to 6 years.

Macrostructure of Self-Generated Picture Books

We described narrative abilities at varying age groups through macrostructure elements as analyzed by the INC. At the 3:0-3:5 age group the narrative elements *setting*, *initiating events*, *plan*, *complication*, *consequence*, *narrator evaluation*, and *knowledge of the dialogue* were absent. Most of the narrative elements that were absent at 3:0-3:5 began to emerge within the 3:6-3:11 age group, with the exception of *complication*. The children continued to use many of these elements across the age groups; however, each element was not always represented. From one age range to the next, there were more narrative elements used as well as increases in complexity of use resulting in higher means and percentage points as the ages increased. There were,

however, variations in the narrative elements used within a given age range. There were also variations in INC points awarded to individual children among all ages. Within some age groups there were only one or two children using a given narrative element; however, because the INC awards additional points for the complexity of a narrative element, higher percentages and means were awarded for a given age group. We expected an increase in narrative element use as the age groups progressed; however, we did not expect the 4:0-4:5 and the 4:6-4-11 age groups to use more complex narrative elements than the 5:0-5:5 age group resulting in a higher percent of narrative element use. We believe these results were due to the limited number of participants within the 5:0 – 5:5 age group as well as the variation in the nature of the task.

We found that children in our study were able to judge story structure requirements needed to allow the listener to understand the narrative even though all narrative structure skills had not been mastered. This was similar to Hudson and Shapiro (1991), who found that narrative elements demonstrate children's ability to understand early judgment of story structure requirements. These abilities became more apparent as the children within their study matured. In addition, our study found that the narrative elements plans and consequences usage increased with age. Although there was some variation among the age groups, consequences increased with an increase in age as well. According to the INC, these elements demonstrate how children within our study understand the intent to act on or solve initiating events (plan) and resolving the problem or not resolving the problem (consequences) within narratives. These findings were similar to those of Hudson and Shapiro (1991) who found story grammar elements such as those demonstrating plans of characters, *causality*, and *consequences* were correlated with an increase in age. These findings may indicate that self-generated stories of typical developing AA children contain the same elements that help to identify the abilities of typical developing EA children who tell stories via varying methods.

African American Self-generated Stories and Story Retells

When interpreting the results of our study, we found that AA preschool children most frequently used the story grammar elements of character, setting, initiating event and action/attempt when producing self-generated narratives. These story grammar elements are consistent with expectations of story structure levels typical of preschool children in producing a descriptive sequence, action sequence

or a reactive sequence that include characters, surroundings, and actions without clear goal-directed behaviors (Hughes et al., 1997; Table 4.3 p. 121). Our findings are similar to other study findings regarding development of story grammar elements found within story retells elicited from AA preschoolers (Curenton & Justice, 2004; Price et al., 2006; McGregor, 2000). Upon further review, however, we found some specific similarities and differences in the rate of occurrence of story grammar elements from our study on self-generated stories to others with story retells. Some of the similarities that were found included the use of *character* and *internal response* in self-generated and retelling of stories. For example, our study's results for the narrative element *character* was 100% for the 4:0 – 4:5 age group and 87.5% for the 5:0 – 5:5 age group. These results were similar to those of Price et al. (2006) who conducted a study describing AA children's narrative retell abilities at 4 years old (M=48.2 months) and at kindergarten entry (M=62.6 months), as well as McGregor (2000) who conducted a study describing AA children's narrative retell abilities of 3, 4, and 5 year olds. The percent use of *character* in story retells for Price et al. (2006) was 95.5% of 4 year olds (4:2) and 97% by kindergarten entry (5:2). The children in the McGregor (2000) used *character* for 4 year olds at 85% and 90% at 5 years old.

Our study found *internal response* was used by 9.09% of 4:0 – 4:5 year olds and 20.00% of 5:0 – 5:5 years old. These findings for this narrative element was similar to what Price et al. (2006) found with 4.5% used by 4 year olds and 21.2% by kindergarten entry. From this information, we can note that AA preschool children demonstrate an understanding of including characters in their stories, and are developing in the use of the psychological states of these characters just as they do from other story retells.

In contrast, there were some differences from our study's story grammar element development in self-generated narratives than there were in the story retelling research of AA children. For example, the narrative element *setting* was used by 40% of the 5:0 – 5:5 year olds in our study. The structural element *setting* was used by 90% of 5 year olds in the McGregor study. There were also differences in the narrative element *knowledge of dialogue*, which was used by 20% of the 5:0 – 5:5 year olds in our study. A similar narrative element *dialogue* was used by 40% of 5 year olds in the McGregor study. These differences in percent use of *setting* and *dialogue* may be due to the differences in the methods of elicitation between our study and the McGregor study. In the McGregor study the examiner asked the participants to narrate the story *Corduroy* from a storybook that they had viewed as a video story on several occasions

(McGregor, 2000). This particular story had both *setting* and *dialogue* that was already created in which participants would only have to recall. In our study the participants' narratives were elicited following a classroom writing activity. The participants were instructed to write stories by creating books through drawing and print. Once the storybooks were created, the participants were asked to tell the story. It may be the case that with self-generated narratives, in which story grammar elements need to be created, the development of some story grammar elements will occur at older age ranges than the same story grammar elements of story retells.

Finally, there was variation in the production of *initiating events*. For our study, *initiating events* were used by 36.3% of the 4:0 – 4:5 age group and 40% of the 5:0 – 5:5 age group. In the McGregor (2000) study, the description of the narrative element *complicating actions*, defined as the problem facing the main characters, was similar in definition to the initiating events for our study. The structural element *complicating action* was used by 35% of 4-year-olds and 50% of 5-year-olds in the McGregor study, which is consistent with the results of our study. In contrast, Price et al. (2006) found that *initiating events* were used by 6% of 4-year-olds and 20% at kindergarten entry. These differences are more difficult to interpret; however, all three elicitation procedures varied from one another. According to Peterson and McCabe (1983), caution should be taken when measuring and interpreting children's narratives, as the elicitation context can affect the story produced and that the topic of discourse may also influence length and complexity of the narratives. Production of narratives may be influenced by interest level of the task. For example, in the Price et al. (2006) study, the narratives were elicited by a short, standardized narrative assessment, created for the purpose of eliciting narratives (Bus Story Language Test; Refrew, 1991); however, the narratives in the McGregor (2000) study were elicited from an authentic picture book, *Corduroy*, which had also been viewed as a video on several occasions by the children. It could be assumed that watching videos and retelling from a children's picture book, may be more engaging than retelling from a standardized tool. In our study, with the elicitation method of self-generated stories, the child may be more able and motivated to create a "problem" (*initiating event*) to their own story as there is freedom to create events, as opposed to relying on memory to recall a specific problem of a story. According to a study by Swanson, Fey, Mills, and Hood (2005), the child's willingness to participate in the tasks (story retell, story generation, and sentence imitation) influenced the production of stories. The authors concluded that

story generation was favored by all of the children because "they could talk about their own experiences, knowledge and interests" and "they did not have a specific story they were supposed to replicate" (p. 139).

Our result showed that self-generated narratives may provide an opportunity for children to generate elements on their own without the increased cognitive load from the attempts to retell a previously presented story. Generating story elements is important for having a true representation of the children's story telling abilities that may reduce the need to rely on memory. However, these self-generated narratives need to be interpreted with caution, as there may be some differences if compared with the results of narratives elicited from story retells. In addition, self-generated narratives can be a method of eliciting narratives that assist in increasing the connection with culture. Because previous research has shown AA children have more experience with oral storytelling (Champion; 1999, 2003; McGregor, 2000; Price et al., 2006; Terry et al., 2013), self-generated narratives may provide a better framework for connecting to cultural and linguistic methods that give more flexibility to storytelling modality (Champion, 1998; Champion et al., 1999; Merritt & Liles, 1989; Southwood & Russell, 2004).

Limitations and Future Research

Although the results of this investigation provide valuable information about self-generated narratives in AA preschool children, there are limitations. First, the sample size was small and there was an unequal distribution of children within each age range making generalizations difficult. Second, there were substantial variations among each age group and between individuals within the same age group making the ability to make normative conclusions a challenge regarding self-generated narratives of preschool children. Furthermore, the self-generated narratives from the children in our study were elicited in a classroom during an instructional activity. Researchers have noted that methods of elicitation may impact narrative production. Lastly, the INC was not designed for preschool children but for children who are school age.

Future research should focus on comparing AA children's narrative macrostructure use from storybook retells to self-generated narratives. In addition, it would be interesting to note if self-generated narratives can identify cultural and linguistic differences of AA preschoolers within the population that may not be noted when using tools that are used with EA children. It would also be interesting to determine if there are cultural and linguistic differences that may

be noted when comparing self-generated narratives of AA preschoolers and EA preschoolers.

CONCLUSION

Based on our findings, self-generated storytelling appears to be a sound method for eliciting narratives and describing the developmental progression of AA preschool children. AA preschool children's narrative skills showed occurrences of causality, understanding of behaviors and goals, as well as social and psychological stages found in the macrostructure used within their narratives. Self-generated narratives may also provide a better platform for making cultural and linguistic connections because the children are creating their own story from their own experiences.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mia Kimmons, MS, CCC-SLP is a licensed speech-language pathologist and PhD candidate in Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of Cincinnati. Her interests include child language and literacy development within culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

Amy Hobek, PhD, CCC-SLP is an Assistant Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of Cincinnati. She is also a licensed speech language pathologist providing clinic supervision of graduate students in a culturally and linguistically diverse preschool setting on UC's campus. Her teaching and scholarship focus on child language and literacy development with an emphasis on valuing and legitimizing cultural and linguistic variations in these areas within individuals, families, and communities.