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A conversational intervention procedure as a tool for improving and evaluating narrative skills: A study of 5- to 8-years old French children

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Measures of Narrative Content

1. Overall coherence score for a story of misunderstanding
A score of 0 to 20 points was attributed for: narrative structure (max. 3 pts), explanation of key events (max. 2x4=8 pts), expression of False Belief and of its rectification (max. 4+3=7 pts) and expression of all the main elements (max. 2 pts).

2. Causal explanation of the 4 key events: pushing, pushing back, showing the stone, picking up the partner

3. References to the characters’ intentional and epistemic states: intentional: does/doesn’t do it on purpose; epistemic: believe, know...

4. False belief expression (FB score: from 0 to 4): For the higher scores (3 and 4, children
- express the unintentional and/or physical cause of the first push: ‘it was third party who pushed on the stone’, AND
- attribute to one of the characters the belief that the push was intentional: ‘le narrateur croit qu’il l’a fait exprès ‘the other one believes he did it on purpose’

5. Rectification of the false belief expression (RFE score: from 0 to 6): For the higher scores, children
- have P explain the physical cause of the first push AND
- have P understand and clear the misunderstanding: ‘il ne disait que c’est à cause de ce caillou que je t’ai pousset...’ and he said that is because of this stone that I pushed you ‘believes’

RESULTS

For all measures and in all groups, a major effect of causal-oriented conversation is found on all subsequent narratives. Post-hoc comparisons showed that second, stability and generalization narratives have a higher score than the first narrative, and, for the most part, are not statistically different among themselves.

Conclusions

1. The findings of earlier studies are validated. A causal-oriented conversation has a major effect on the content of all children’s subsequent narratives: Increase in overall score of coherence, explanation of events, expression of epistemic states, false belief and rectification of misunderstanding. The effect is stronger for children four years or more old than for 5-6 yrs. 2. This effect persists one week later (stability narrative) and 3. Is generalizable for all measures (excepted epistemic states and RFB in 5-6 year olds). 4. Children who express the FB in at least one of the four narratives tend to be those who have good mastery of ToM FB tasks. Results confirm the importance of the conversational procedure for improving young children’s narrative functioning and its usefulness in the assessment of children’s narrative competencies.