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A conversational intervention procedure as a tool for improving and evaluating narrative skills: A study of 5- to 8-year 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. 2 x 4 pts), expression of False Belief and of its rectification (max. 4 x 5 = 20 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: 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: “if a trampled sur sa pierre ‘he stumbled on a stone’” AND
- attribute to one of the characters the belief that the push was intended : ‘la croit qu’il l’a fait exprès ‘the other one believes he did it on purpose’

5. Rectification of the false belief expression (RFC score: from 0 to 6) : For the higher scores, children
- have P2 explain the physical cause of the first push AND
- have P2 understand and clear the misunderstanding: it etait que c’est à cause de ce caillou que je t’ai poussé...

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 then the first narrative, and, for the most part, are not statistically different among themselves.

Fig. 1 Overall coherence, by narrative and class/age
Fig. 2 Explanation of key events, by narrative and class/age
Fig. 3 Epistemic States, by narrative and class/age
Fig. 4 FB expression, by narrative and class/age
Fig. 5 RFC expression, by narrative and class/age
Fig. 6 Success in ToM tasks according to class/age
Fig. 7 Relationship between FB expression in narratives and success in ToM tasks

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 for 5-7 years 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 RFC 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.