Bigger than Bubble Cheeks: The Case Study of a Storyteller in a Multicultural Classroom

Jennifer Seidel

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Abstract

Since the late twentieth century, research on narrative style and development has shown significant variation between and among the narrative styles of different cultural groups, both in content and form. Beyond providing an interesting reflection of diverse cultural values and practices, this variation has a direct impact on the experiences of children in multicultural classrooms. Storytelling is a valuable way in which many skills and much knowledge are developed in school. However, many teachers are only aware of the culturally dominant school-based narrative style, and therefore are not able to properly understand and work with the narratives told by students of non-dominant cultures. While this has become a well-recognized issue in the field of discourse analysis and education, it is still unaddressed in many classrooms today. This study presents the case of a particularly diverse preschool classroom and one enthusiastic storyteller whose style does not match the dominant narrative expectations. An analysis of his stories and the literary skills he is developing are presented, followed by a discussion of his school setting and the implications of diverse narrative styles in multicultural classrooms.

Introduction

Stories are a universal form of discourse, told around the world as a means of communicating events and ideas with other people. Storytelling serves a number of different purposes, from sharing past experiences with others, to acting as a culturally-specific art form, to helping individuals interpret their experiences and the world around them (McCabe 1997). While the existence of storytelling may be ubiquitous, the exact content of and style in which stories are told can vary significantly between and within

cultures and languages. Research into the different narrative styles that exist has helped to create both better descriptions and a better understanding of these styles. However, diverse narrative styles are sometimes still unrecognized in today's schools, where the universality of storytelling is often being taken for granted and the individual differences in storytellers' styles misunderstood as inability to properly tell stories. The purpose of this thesis is to present the case of a young storyteller with a non-dominant narrative style, analyze his narratives in regards to the literary skills he is developing, and present a discussion of the schooling environment that would help him further develop these skills.

The paper will begin with a literature review on the subject of narrative development and style. First, the term narrative will be defined and different characteristics that exist across many cultural storytelling styles will be examined. Included in this examination will be the purpose that narratives can serve for both individuals and entire cultures, followed by an overview of what is traditionally defined as narrative development. Next, the history of narrative research will be addressed, and an overview will be given of many of the different narrative styles that have emerged in the research. In the following section, the benefits of working with narratives in school settings will be shown, as well as an examination of sharing time, which serves as a platform for narrative work in early education classrooms.

The second section of the paper will present the research conducted in this study. After a review of the location and methodology, the general storytelling style found across the classroom will be briefly presented and analyzed. One child in particular will then be looked at in greater depth, with a discussion of the particular skills that he is developing and an argument for why these skills are important. The final section will

discuss how the classroom reacts to the focus student of this study and compare his style with the existing literature. An argument will then be made for the importance of acknowledging multicultural narrative styles in the classroom and suggestions provided for how these can be implemented in early education settings.

Literature Review

Defining Narrative

When discussing storytelling, the term *story* must first be defined. This paper will use story and narrative interchangeably, viewing the term *narrative* as a formal equivalent to the colloquial term *story.* Narrative has seen many different definitions in the past fifty years. In 1972, Labov famously defined a minimal narrative as two specific past events given in sequence. Several years later, Stein & Glenn expanded upon this definition, saying that a true narrative must include setting, characters, an initiating event, actions and reactions, consequences, and conclusions (1979). McCabe and Peterson added the allowance that a narrative may be real or imaginary, which is important if the narratives of preschoolers are to be included in the definition (1991). For this reason, McCabe and Peterson's definition will be used: "the oral sequencing of temporally successive events, real or imaginary." (1991, p.ix).

While many aspects of narrative context, content, and form are culturally dependent, there are some aspects of narrative that appear to be universal. All narratives relate events that are distributed over time (Deese, 1983). Several authors emphasize the involvement of sense-making of experiences and self-presentation, particularly in the narratives of children (Hymes, 1982; McCabe, 1997). Deese also argues that all

narratives are about events that involve animate beings (1983). This does not necessarily mean that there must be living or personified characters in every narrative, but rather that some sort of action must happen. Furthermore, narratives must include human perspective. Many researchers insist that narratives require more than just relating the event in question: the narrator must also imply something beyond what can be understood from the words alone. Labov called this aspect "evaluation", noting that along with the "reference" or explanation of the event (the "who, what, when, and where" of the story), all narratives also contain this evaluative aspect (the "why" from the perspective of the narrator) (Labov, 1972; Deese, 1983; Keebler, 1995). A short example of evaluation can be seen in the following story told by a 6 year old, European North American boy (McCabe, 1997, p.456):

> *I broke my arm… I was climbing the tree and I, well see, I went towards the low branch, and I and I got caught with my baving suit? I dangled my hands down and they got bent because it was like this hard surface under it… but luckily it was my left arm that broke.*

At the end of his story, the boy adds with his thoughts about the conclusion: luckily his left arm broke instead of his right arm. Evaluation can be added both explicitly, for example by announcing that the story was told for a certain reason or explaining what was learned through the action in the story, as well as implicitly, by simply including additional thoughts and opinions that are not part of the story without explicitly marking them as being one's own evaluation.

Beyond technical definitions, narratives constitute a fundamental human activity. Through narratives, we present ourselves and our experiences to others. It is through

narratives that we fill our peers and loved ones in on experiences that they have missed

and share the lessons that we have learned from those experiences (Keebler, 1995;

McCabe & Peterson, 1991). Narratives help us to make sense of our lives, to organize,

interpret and store our experiences (Hymes, 1982; Gee, 1985). Indeed, Gee points out

that "personal memories that are unrehearsed disappear, but to rehearse them means to

retell them in a narrative fashion" (1991, p. 3). Not only are our own memories and

histories then made up of narrative, but Gee also goes on to note that we cannot know any

past events apart from the narratives about them. As stories are shared among groups of

people, they come together to make up the history and outline the culture of a people. As

every culture develops its own way of presenting stories, narratives become constitutive

of culture, simultaneously reflecting and creating the culture of a group of people.

As if to highlight the fundamental role narrative plays in human lives, it is seen

that narrative competence begins very early in a child's language development. Children

under one year of age already show evidence of memory specific event episodes

(Ashmead & Perlmutter, 1980). By age 3, children are able to produce minimal personal

narratives without support, incorporating some evaluation, and by age 6 are generally

able to tell complete and coherent personal narratives (Kublin, 1995). Typically in

preschool years, between ages 3 and 5, children begin to develop schema of narrative

organization, as well as autobiographical memory and the crucial understanding that

people can have different ideas, motivations, and feelings (Peterson C. , 2009). They will

also continue to elaborate more on conversations they have had, provide more contextual

information and speak more specifically about people and objects involved, instead of

using ambiguous pronouns (Peterson C. , 2009).

Skills such as metaphorical thinking also begin to develop early. Metaphorical thinking develops first as noun-noun substitutions, particularly in child's play between twelve and twenty-four months (Geary, 2012). Children of this age will describe and use one item entirely as another in the course of play, but have difficulty understanding metaphorical speech outside of such context. By ages five and six, children develop the ability to understand metaphors that relate objects based on physical similarities, but still have trouble with metaphors that draw on functional similarity until closer to eight or nine years of age (Geary, 2012). As will be shown, many studies done with pre- and elementary school aged children also show the culturally influenced differences in style that exist in these narrative abilities that the children are developing (Michaels, 1983; Peterson & McCabe, 1981, for example). It is truly amazing to see that children as young as three and four years old, who have not been talking for very long, are able to display such culturally affected language and specific narrative style.

History of Narrative Research

Narrative function, form, and style have been areas of interest for researchers since the mid 20th century, and many methods of analysis have emerged throughout the years. In 1968, Vladimir Propp analyzed traditional Russian fairy tales, and from his work came the idea of story grammar and episodic analysis, a form of structural analysis that proposes certain minimal elements necessary for a text to be considered a narrative and organizes stories around embedded episodes. William Labov pioneered another popular method of analysis known as high-point analysis, which organizes narratives around "high-points" or "suspension-points" and emphasizes the importance of both what happened in the story and the narrator's attitude towards the story (1972). High-point

analysis is performed at the clause level, and is used to label narratives as having different structural patterns. While these and similar narrative analysis methods are still in use today, they can be limited when it comes to the analysis of divergent narrative styles.

As more narrative styles began to be recognized, organizing narratives into stanzas or verses was seen to be a much more effective means of understanding and analyzing these different styles (Gee, 1991; Hymes, 1982; Minami, 1991). By analyzing stories from different Native American tribes in terms of verses, Hymes was able to find different patterns of narrative organization that were specific to the different tribes (1982). Similarly, Gee found that organizing the narrative data he collected in "thematically constant units" (1986, p.403) helped to highlight the differences between young African American and European North American storytellers.

Dell Hymes was one of the first researchers to speak to the social implications of diverse narrative styles, highlighting what he called an "inequality of opportunity" in our society's perspective on narrative and whose narratives are recognized to have a cognitive function (1996). According to Hymes, our society has the tendency to dichotomize forms of language, viewing abstract and fact-based speech as superior to experience-based narrative speech. Take the case of a working class White student from a low-income background who was interviewed throughout his career at Harvard University. In his first years, he used significantly more personal narratives as a means of clarifying what he was talking about. Throughout his career, however, he began using fewer narratives and instead would rephrase his points in abstract terms as a means of explanation, in what Cazden called the "Harvardization" of his speech (1996). This

student was adopting Harvard's preferred style of speech that values abstract and generalized explanations above concrete example-based explanations. Through his own work with Native Americans, Hymes noticed a gap in the established areas of research between the more cognitively focused field of linguistics and the field of anthropology that often ignored language. He therefore called for more research to be done into the anthropology of language and educational ethnography (Farr, 2004). What follows is a brief overview of just this sort of research, with examples of some of the many forms and purposes that narratives can take across cultures.

Cultural Differences in Narrative Style

Before illuminating the various narrative styles that have been found to exist in different cultures, it is important to note that not all members of a culture necessarily conform to the described style. The goal of this field of research is not to essentialize people, but simply to show patterns that have been found in and among cultures. Indeed, to quote McCabe, "variation within a culture is as remarkable as variation between cultures." (1997, p.455). Research has shown that within a culture, variation can be based on a plethora of different factors. European North American speakers, for example, differ in the extent to which they foreground setting and the length of their narratives (Peterson & McCabe, 1992). European North American girls are shown to foreground conversation more than boys (Ely & McCabe, 1993). Variation can also exist within subgroups that share the same labels. Among Native Americans, stories told by the Sioux contain more action while the Navajo reference family and cultural themes more (John-Steiner & Panofsky, 1992). Europeans may share similar heritage and trends in narrative style, but Hungarian children are seen to embellish stories and use cohesive

devices much more frequently (John-Steiner & Panofsky, 1992). Variation also exists based on the economic status of members of the same group. Blum-Kulka and Snow showed that 60% of American working class families involved shared experiences in their stories while only 30% of middle class families did so (1992).

With an understanding that the following trends are not all-inclusive, some of the different narrative styles that have been researched and described will now be presented. Narrative styles can vary in their organization and what information they include. In our society, the culturally dominant narrative style is what Michaels calls "topic-centered stories", typical of European North American speakers (1981). These narratives center around one event, and show a clear beginning with orientation, middle with build up to a central conflict, and ending complete with the narrator's reflection and evaluation of the story (Peterson & McCabe, 1983). Topic-centered stories focus on one happening at a time, and develop through the sequential or logical presentation of information. Furthermore, these are the type of narratives that are generally seen in literature and expected in schools. Building off of Labov's high-point analysis as well as Michael's "topic-centered" narrative style, Keebler (1995) used the following features to determine school-based literacy style narratives (p.59):

- Tightly structured discourse on a single topic

- No major shifts in perspective, temporal orientation, or thematic focus

- Overall theme primarily developed through a sequential or logical progression of information

- Clear beginning, middle, and end

- Relationships between parts of the story or narrative are made lexically or syntactically explicit

- Explicit lexical and syntactic devices to signal such things as background-foreground structure, agent focus, perspective shifts, new information, and causal connection

- Very little background information assumed

Contrasting these topic-centered stories are "topic-associating stories" that are commonly heard in African American communities throughout the United States (Michaels, 1981; Cazden, 1988; Gee, 1989). Rather than presenting one event in logical sequence, these stories are tied to a theme, linking together numerous events that relate to that theme (McCabe, 1997). Topic-associating stories have no clear beginning, middle, and end, and require a greater amount of inference on the part of the audience. These stories can be compared to a musical event: "African American children may begin and end with a theme, improvising on events in between these two points in a fashion reminiscent of jazz compositions." (McCabe, 1997, p.459) Indeed, prosody too plays a big role in the telling of these stories, as narrators rely on rhythmic devices, tempo, intonation, sound effects, and even gestures to convey important points of the story. While topic-centered stories make use of lexical and syntactic devices to achieve thematic cohesion, topic-associating stories often make use of prosody to mark shifts (Michaels and Collins, 1984; Gee, 1989).

Narratives may also vary by the amount of orientation, description, and evaluation that is typically used. Heath found, in a study of two nearby towns in the Piedmont region of the Carolinas, that narrators from the White working class Roadville

community used very little evaluation in their stories while speakers from Black working

class Trackton used lots of evaluation and even invited their audience to evaluate as well

(1983). Another study showed that while European North American children tend to use

only explicit evaluative features, African American children made use of both explicit

and implicit evaluation, such as dialogue and double progressives (Gregory & Tabors,

1991). These differences can occur across languages of the same speakers as well.

Spanish/English bilingual children are more likely to include initiating events in their

stories told in Spanish and consequences and evaluation in their stories told in English

(Fiestas & Peña, 2004). These differences are often reflective of the cultural values of the

storytellers. Japanese children tend to tell stories that, like topic-associating stories, are

cohesive collections of several experiences, but are much more concise (Minami &

McCabe, 1991). These restrained stories are reflective of "the Japanese cultural value of

avoiding verbosity that would insult listeners and embarrass narrators." (McCabe, 1997,

p.457). Arapaho stories often have no climax or conclusion because they believe that life

does not have a conclusion (Cazden, 1988).

Narrative styles can differ by what is foregrounded or portrayed as important in

the story. Topic-centered stories tend to foreground plot. While all narratives will

revolve around some sort of event, some place greater emphasis and more meaning on

different aspects of the story. In contrast to topic-centered stories, Japanese folktales are

not organized around plot or goal attainment (Matsuyama, 1983). Likewise, topic-

associating stories are often organized around a theme rather than one isolated event.

Kaluli stories will foreground the location (Schieffelin & Eisenberg, 1984). Latinos

commonly foreground family in narratives, which once again is reflective of the culture

and the view of oneself in terms of one's role in the family (Shorris, 1992). By foregrounding family relationships, these narratives also involve less action. A study performed by McCabe showed that actions accounted for 34% of narrative comments by Latino children as opposed to 47% of comments made by European North American children (1997).

Furthermore, the general purpose of telling a narrative can vary by culture. In one study, Hawaiian students would tell teasing stories that rely on a great deal of peer contribution, turning the storytelling into a collaborative effort (Watson, 1975). Returning to Heath's research in the Piedmont Carolinas, it was discovered that the members of the Roadville community generally told formulaic and factual accounts of overcoming conflict in order to teach lessons. Narrators from Trackton, on the other hand, told fictionalized and performative stories with no other purpose than to entertain. These storytellers would continue as long as the audience appeared to be enjoying the story, and like the Hawaiian storytellers, relied on participation by the audience to encourage and develop their stories, participation elicited by their performative style (1983).

These are just some of the many variations in narrative style that have been demonstrated by researchers in the past few decades. Much of the more recent research reflects a high variability of styles found within cultures and calls for the need for further research on the occurrence of these styles (Kublin, 1999; Fiestas & Peña, 2004). However, it is clear that variation in narrative style does exist and that these styles are not simply poorly told stories, but rather organized in their own distinct ways and often reflective of greater cultural values and practices.

Stories and School

One of the places in which this diversity of narrative style can have great implications is the classroom. With the different narrative styles described above in mind, it is easy to accept the ubiquity and the importance of narrative in general, but it is perhaps less clear as to what exactly its importance is in the classroom. The roles of narrative in general are many. As mentioned earlier, narratives can be used to help students think about, interact with, and make sense of the world and their experiences (Dennet, 1991; McCabe, 1997; Hymes, 1982; Gee, 1985). These skills are equally important in early education for teachers as they begin to teach students about the world around them. Narratives have also been shown to help students with developing arguments (Bruner, 1990). Using familiar adults' narratives has been shown to be one of the most effective ways to teach history to children (Wigginton, 1977). Hymes points out the ability of narratives to clarify opinions and terms where straight definitions sometimes fall short (1996). Furthermore, narrative skills are seen as a gateway to literacy skills, teaching students how to comprehend and create the kinds of texts that will be expected of them as they proceed in school (Cazden, 1988).

The implications of narrative style on literacy, both a culture's definition of literacy and an individual's development of literacy, are great. In his 2015 book, Gee argues that literacy cannot be seen outside of culture, in terms both of its use and the effects that it has. Literacy is a technology, and all technology is a reflection of the politics and culture of the time in which it came about. When it is seen that children in poverty are performing more poorly than their wealthier counterparts in reading, a social fact, it becomes clear that the ability to read is not merely a mental task. The books and

language in the classroom are typically aligned with the dominant narrative style, and while many students come to school already developing the dominant literate narrative style, those who have not been exposed to this type of language at home are at a disadvantage. Success in school is truly based on the ability to become fluent in the discourse, interactional styles, and written and spoken codes of the dominant culture (Delpit, 1988). As Michaels puts it, "where teacher and child do not share a set of discourse strategies, the teacher – despite the best educational intentions – may be unable to build upon what the child already knows, or may incorrectly assess the child's skills and needs altogether." (Michaels & Cazden, 1986, p.138).

Beyond its implications on literacy, narrative variation must be taken into account when working in multicultural classrooms for a number of reasons. For example, narrative style variation has been shown to be important to comprehension and memory of stories. Pritchard showed that students recall significantly more ideas and produce fewer distortions for culturally familiar stories than those that are not told in a familiar style (1990). In the social sphere, cultural differences in narrative style can lead to miscommunications and isolation of those students who are not understood. McCabe references a particular miscommunication in one of her classrooms: a White student tried to correct an African American student on the form of his story and was taken to be a bully, when really she was just trying to help her fellow student produce a narrative that was in line with her cultural expectations (1997). On the other side, African American students can be misunderstood as bullying by White students when engaging in a typical language game known as "teasing", which is actually intended to be fun (Labov, 1972; McCabe, 1997). Thus, including only one style of narrative in the classroom is not

enough to be effective as a teacher, and especially not when working in multicultural environments. In her dissertation, Keebler showed that when teachers have knowledge of these differences, what becomes important is the focus on meaning and the ability to be reflective about the stories that are being told (1995). Armed with the knowledge that many culturally affected narrative styles exist, teachers will know to take more time to understand a story that may at first seem poorly told.

Sharing Time

A useful space for working on narrative development that has been popular in many elementary and preschool classrooms is sharing time. Sharing time is meant to be a regular classroom activity in which the entire class comes together to listen to and tell stories, on whatever topic they choose. Sometimes this activity is replaced with Show and Tell, which likewise allows children the opportunity to talk in front of their peers, but does not always relate back to narrative development. Sharing time gives students the chance to work on the many skills that narratives have to offer: "through the act of telling a story or listening to the story of another, children acquire skills in crafting and listening to lengthy, complex, and interesting texts. In addition to the development of oral language abilities, these skills also carry over to facilitate the development of some reading and writing abilities" (Griffin, 2004, p.23).

There has been a significant amount of research into the use and importance of sharing time in schools. Sharing time began as a space for students to develop social skills and oral speaking abilities. Cazden outlined four important reasons that teachers should incorporate sharing time into their classrooms: it is the only opportunity for students to create oral texts; it is often the only chance for students to talk about

experiences outside of school and incorporate these into their learning; it is a key activity through which to develop narrative style and skills; and it can serve as oral preparation for literacy skills (1988). Pushed by many researchers in education, in particular Cazden and Michaels, sharing time became a popular space in the classroom to do more than just these four things. Sharing time could also bring a classroom together, as the "intermingling of individual children's stories during whole-class sharing-time events creates a shared imaginative world specific to that classroom culture and to which each child has contributed as a storyteller and audience member" (Griffin, 2004, p.23). Furthermore, with the increasing knowledge of the multiplicity of narrative style that can exist in a culturally diverse classroom, McCabe argued that sharing time can be used to gain insights into the experiences and culture of their students which can help teachers to develop relevant curriculum (1997).

Still today, sharing time is seen as a beneficial regular activity for early education classrooms for promoting a variety of skills including cultural awareness and acceptance among teachers and students (Bauml, 2014). Unfortunately, sharing time is currently absent in many schools, including the school in which this study was conducted. This paper will now present the case of a particularly culturally diverse preschool that at first did not practice sharing time and the unnoticed skills of one storyteller whose style does not match the school expected dominant narrative style.

The Study

The purpose of this study is to identify varying narrative styles as they develop in students in a preschool classroom as well as to analyze how their narrative styles affect

the students' experiences in the classroom. Based on recommendations made in the literature, sharing time was introduced into the regular classroom activities of the preschool as a space in which to record student's narratives and explore student interactions based on these narratives. The study was originally designed, before entering the preschool, with the intention of specifically comparing a group of several native English speakers with several native speakers of another language as they develop English storytelling skills. However, upon learning the diverse language and cultural makeup of the classroom, as well as getting to know the children and hearing what they had to say, the scope of the study was changed. One student in particular was the most eager to share and so became the primary focus of the resulting analysis.

Location

The present study was conducted in a preschool outside of Boston, Massachusetts. The school operates half days five days per week, with two full-time teachers and one full-time volunteer. The main language used in the classroom is English. Although the head teacher's first language is Haitian Creole, she speaks fluent English, and the other teacher and volunteer are native English speakers. Two other volunteers frequently help out at the preschool as well, and speak mostly Spanish in the classroom. Materials are primarily in English, with a few Spanish-English bilingual books. There are 18 students between ages 3 and 5 enrolled in the preschool. It is a very diverse classroom, encompassing 7 different native languages spoken by the students. As reported by parents, languages spoken at home are divided among the students as follows: 2 English, 1 Gujarati, 3 Somali, 5 Spanish, 1 Haitian Creole, 5 Arabic, and 1 Portuguese. Most children are very comfortable in English, meaning they speak fluently for their ages and

do not have trouble expressing their thoughts, with the exception of one Somali speaker and two of the Arabic speakers. The principal investigator became involved with this preschool through her work with a volunteer program that provides a biweekly literacy-focused supplementary program for preschools in underserved populations. Through this program, the PI worked in the classroom three to four days per week and was thereby able to build and maintain strong relationships with the children. This allowed for the children to be comfortable and behave naturally during data collection sessions.

Methodology

For the purposes of this study, and as approved by the Institutional Review Board of Tufts University, a weekly sharing time session was introduced to the regular classroom activities in the preschool. Upon the collection of parental permission forms and language usage surveys, data collection began during these sessions at the preschool and continued over the course of three months. Sharing Time was held as an activity in which the children are free to share any stories of their choosing. Students were seated in a circle on a carpet, with the teachers, PI, and a small tape recorder at one end. Generally, students were prompted with a quick anecdote from the teacher about a particular topic, followed up by a question such as: "has anything like this ever happened to you?" As the students responded to the prompt, they were left to create their stories entirely on their own, with no leading questions or directions from the teacher. Instead of responding with questions like "what happened next?" or "how did you feel about that?", responses were confined to repeating the last few words that students said or simply nodding encouragingly. The purpose of this was to collect stories that were told as the student would naturally tell them, with no influence from outside sources, in order to observe any

cultural variation that might exist in their narrative styles. Leading questions can push the students in directions they were not intending to follow, and thus were avoided.

The principal investigator recorded these sessions with a tape recorder. Students were generally unaware or unconcerned with the fact that they were being recorded. Again, the purpose of collecting data during sharing time as opposed to in individual interviews was to collect as much naturally generated speech as possible. Pulling students aside in individual sessions would have disrupted the regular classroom schedule as well as potentially made students nervous about the focused, individualized intention. Furthermore, the interactions among the students turned out to be useful in the resulting analysis. Throughout the data collection period, unofficial conversations with the teacher were also noted and used in the analysis of the resulting data. All recorded data were then transcribed, marked for prosody and other potentially important details, and were stored on the PI's computer.

Results

Many students' attendance and participation varied greatly, with several choosing not to participate at all. Of the 18 students in the classroom, only 10 contributed during sharing time, and fewer told narratives without the assistance of other class members or the teacher. Those stories that were understandable and the entirety of which could be discerned from the recordings were chosen, resulting in 65 stories of varying lengths collected over the course of the seven weekly data collection sessions. The following table remarks the distribution of collected stories.

Number of stories told	Number of students
16	1
11	1
10	1
7	2
4	2
2	3

The student with 16 collected stories told many more than were recorded, often outside of sharing time sessions, and due to his enjoyment of storytelling and distinct narrative style, he was chosen as the focus in the analysis to follow. A sample of the different kinds of narratives found in the classroom will first be presented in order to provide a picture of the classroom as a whole as well as to contrast the analysis of the narrative style of the focus student that follows. In the interpretation to follow, previous literature as well as personal conversations and discussions with Cindy Ballenger are also drawn upon. The stories are analyzed in reference to previously described narrative styles, looking for similarities to these styles, as well as for the literary skills that are included. Only qualitative means are used to describe the data resulting from the study, since qualitative descriptions give deeper and fuller insight into what the students are actually saying and working on as they tell stories.

Analysis

The typical story told in this classroom fit best with Labov's description of a minimal narrative (1972). As mentioned in the literature review, Keebler (1995) used the following points to distinguish a school-based narrative:

- Tightly structured discourse on a single topic

- No major shifts in perspective, temporal orientation, or thematic focus

- Overall theme primarily developed through a sequential or logical progression of information

- Clear beginning, middle, and end

- Relationships between parts of the story or narrative are made lexically or syntactically explicit

- Explicit lexical and syntactic devices to signal such things as background-foreground structure, agent focus, perspective shifts, new information, and causal connection

- Very little background information assumed

From Keebler's list of requisites for being called a school-based narrative, the last few points listed, such as assuming little background knowledge on the part of the speakers and making relationships throughout the story explicit were not easily detected in the typical narrative due to the brevity of those narratives. However, the first four primarily structural points serve well to describe the typical narrative found. The stories were tightly structured around one event with no major shifts and had clear beginning, middle, and ends that developed through sequential or logical progressions. Even Cazden's "sharing time intonation", a particular prosodic pattern involving rising intonation at the end of phrases, was commonly heard in the typical classroom narrative (1988). This intonation stands in contrast to other story telling intonations to be explored later.

Most of the narrators preferred to tell short, factual narratives, with very little embellishment or description. Often these stories would remain only one sentence or

phrase long, unless prodded and helped by one of the teachers. A prime example comes

from John, in response to a prompt about going to the doctor:

John: I got two shots

Teacher: You got two shots?

John: Yeah

Teacher: Then what?

John: They gave me a Band-Aid

Teacher: They gave you a Band-Aid?

John: Yeah.

Although John excitedly raised his hand to share after hearing the teacher's

original story about a trip to the doctor, he had very little to say in his own story. It

seems that the important information to him was the fact that he got two shots, and

nothing else needed to be said. It was only upon being pushed by the teacher that he

added the detail about receiving a Band-Aid for the shots. Most of the students' stories

went this way, offering very little information without being pushed by the teachers. On

occasion, other students would ask for more information after a story was told, but this

was very rare.

A few different narrative styles did emerge in the data, however, some of which

match those described in the literature on narrative style and cultural background. For

example, one student, Lila, from a Hispanic household, foregrounded her family

members above all in the majority of her narratives, paying less attention to the events or

settings involved in her stories. The following excerpt, prompted by discussion of the

changing colors of the leaves, illustrates just that:

Lila: We jumped in the leaves but Matthew didn't see it and we jumped in the

leaves

Teacher: You jumped in the leaves?

Lila: Mmhm and Kayou did

Teacher: Kayou did?

Lila: Mmhm he jumped in so no one could see him

Teacher: No one could see him?

Lila: Mmhm he jumped in so no one could see him and he did it again and again

While most students spoke of the leaves themselves or their own personal experiences with those leaves, Lila was sure to bring two of her siblings and their experiences into the story. Matthew is a frequent referent in her stories, and often her stories will revolve entirely around something that Matthew did, with Lila merely speaking as an observer or narrator. This foregrounding of the characters in the story, particularly family members and close friends, is common among Hispanic storytellers (Rodino et al. 1991), and Lila as well as another Hispanic student in the classroom both seem to be developing such tendencies.

Another student, from a Somali background, consistently responded to the prompts by saying that he was scared. He would only sometimes follow this up with the thing or event that scared him. Interestingly, this student is relatively outgoing and in fact quite bold in the classroom, so it seems that this emphasis on experiencing a scary situation is more an indication of what he considers a necessary component of a story than just his general state of being. The literature does not, however, describe narrative styles that focus on fear, so this could be more of a reflection of the particular exposure to

stories that he has had in his life or an indicator of what thoughts and skills he was working on at the time of data collection. Apart from these two cases, most of the class was happy to tell brief, accurate accounts of personal events. The most prolific student student, however, whom we will call Reverie, had an entirely different approach. He was the student who told the most stories (16) within the time frame of data collection.

Reverie's Narratives

Reverie comes from a Haitian family, and turned five during the process of data collection. He is a very energetic, curious, and imaginative student who loves to crack jokes and tell grandiose stories. He spends a great deal of time with his grandmother who speaks only Haitian Creole, and likewise his mother speaks mainly Haitian Creole and a little English. However, he has several older school-aged siblings who likely speak English with him, leading to his relative confidence and ease in the English language. Although his vocabulary is not extensive, and his pronunciation somewhat swayed by the Haitian Creole language, Reverie has no trouble getting his ideas and stories across, often with quite amazing speed. In contrast to most of the students' short factual accounts, Reverie's stories were embellished both structurally and in content. His stories can be more effectively described along the lines of Michaels' "topic-associating" storytelling style, which are different from the standard narrative style typically expected in schools (1981). The following analysis will describe the skills that Reverie is working on as well as the benefits that these skills offer in narratives as well as in the classroom. The language used in the analysis of Reverie's stories will be descriptive and more informal, in order to highlight the descriptive quality of his storytelling and emphasize the value of

such language in the telling of a story (such as the story of Reverie's narrative development). Finally, while this paper will focus on the positive abilities that Reverie is clearly working on through his stories, it is important to remember that he is only five years old and still very much in the process of developing his storytelling style.

Imagery and Vivid Scenes

Reverie's stories paint vivid scenes that can easily be imagined by anyone who is listening. As you watch him speak, you can tell that he is imagining these vibrant scenes in his mind and trying to the best of his ability to get them across to the listener. Although his vocabulary is generally less varied than that of some of the other students, when he tells stories, he is often able to find just the right word to express the scene that he sees. In one story, he is describing a cat that he has seen:

> *The cat just lights up, the cat's eyes, like the video…*

Here, the listener can imagine a cat with eyes glowing in the dark. While a more verbose person might describe the cat's eyes as glowing or bright, Reverie is using what he knows to elicit the same image. He then uses a simile to further his point. Out of context, it is unclear whether he is referring to a video of a cat with bright eyes or whether he is simply referencing the way a video screen can light up in the dark, but in the context of an oral story, specific referents are not always necessary for an oral story to make sense. With either interpretation, this comparison allows Reverie to elicit a particular image in the minds of his listeners.

Reverie is among the first students in the classroom to have made use of metaphor and simile, such as the comparison between the cat's eyes and a video. Metaphorical thinking is argued to be crucial to more general understanding and processing of the

world around us, and is particularly useful in analysis of literature (Geary, 2012).

Metaphor essentially compares and picks out similarities between two things. As another

example, Reverie uses a particularly comedic comparison in one of his later stories:

I fly like a lizard.

 One can only imagine what motivated him to say lizard, be it a misunderstanding of the

word *lizard* or perhaps a video that he has seen involving a flying lizard. Technically this

is a simile, much like the comparison made between the cat and a video earlier, but

nonetheless a comparison. A further example comes in his description of a spider that

just ate a lot of people as having very big cheeks:

Bigger than bubble cheeks.

Bubble cheeks is a method used in the classroom to help children quiet down by

having them puff out their cheeks (thus not being able to talk). It is unclear whether or

not Reverie is using this as a hyperbole, comparing the spider's cheeks to Reverie's

bubble cheeks, which clearly could not be bigger, or simply imagining that the spider's

cheeks were filled to become bigger than a spider doing bubble cheeks, which is

hypothetically possible. Regardless, here he is again juxtaposing two different things, the

largeness of this thing with the largeness of bubble cheeks, and this comparative ability is

an indicator of an advanced level of thinking.

It can also be argued that Reverie's style uses intensifiers in a unique way in his

classroom. He uses intensifiers for engagement of the audience and to create drama in

the details of his stories. Particularly, he often uses "so", describing scenes such as the

following:

1. *I jumped like this, SO high… and then I landed…*

2. My big sister is so. crazy.

3. I was going so fast, like so fast, then I was speeding…

This use of intensifiers shows his ability to emphasize aspects of the story that are of particular importance to him and create more fantastical scenes than are described by other students in their stories. It is not just his use of the word *so* that adds to the story, but his prosody in using it. In the first story, he places the major emphasis of the phrase on *so*, helping the listener to understand just how high he jumped and create an image of him jumping well up into the air (he later goes on to describe jumping over a house to further clarify just how high he jumped). The second story places equal emphasis on both *so* and *crazy,* both of which are also spoken at a lower pitch than the rest of the phrase and followed by pauses. This seems to be Reverie's way of emphasizing that he is serious about his description of his sister, that she truly is very crazy. Finally, the third story sees elongation of the vowels in the first *so fast,* while the second *so fast* is sped up. This is an interesting technique in which the tempo of his speech increases as he describes his increasing speed. Again, here, the listener is helped to imagine him as he runs faster and faster through the course of the story.

Another device that Reverie uses to add drama and build imagery in his stories is repetition. He will often use repetition for purely rhythmic effect, but there have also been cases that add to the meaning of the story as well. An example goes back to his description of the spider, repeating an intensifier for added intensity:

Then the spider ate all the people

Then he [got] the big cheeks…

Bigger than bubble cheeks

Bigger bigger bigger bigger!

Here, the repetition of the word bigger can be interpreted in two ways. First, he may be repeating the word to emphasize just how large these cheeks were. Second, you might see this repetition as a representation of the cheeks in the process of growing, imagining that they become slightly bigger with each repetition of the word. Either way, the repetition serves a purpose in the story and contributes to the vivid picture that Reverie is trying to paint of a monstrous spider. It is clear that through his storytelling, Reverie is developing the use of imagery through devices such as metaphor, intensifiers, and repetition.

Music and Rhythm

Beyond imagery, Reverie is clearly developing a very rhythmic and musical narrative style. Often his stories are driven by prosody, becoming more focused on the rhythm of his speech than actual plot or content, and even adding in unrelated words and details in order to keep that rhythm going. One key device that Reverie uses to maintain his rhythm is repetition, both of one word and of short phrases that may vary by one or two words but maintain the same prosody throughout. Consider this example about a monster's repeated transformations, in which the meaning of the actual words seems quite secondary to the effects of prosody:

It turned into a ghost. monster.

Then it turned into a ant then it turned into a spider turned into a snake turned into a Jennifer… turned into a shoes and a pants and a skin and a face and a nose AND… the monster ate… Jasmin!

Here, Reverie is describing the monster as it continually turns into new things before finally eating one of his classmates. With each repetition, he speeds up just a little, slowing down briefly after the snake only to pick the pace right back up when he gets to *shoes*. It is clear from his story that he does not care what the monster actually turns into with each iteration, but rather he is focused on keeping the flow of the story. Reverie is creating a strong pattern and structure to his story through the consistency of his prosody. His gradual increase in speed as well as a slight rise in pitch acts as a crescendo to the climactic moment when it is revealed that the monster is about to eat someone. This repetition coupled with the prosody builds the suspense and draws the listener in, despite the fact that he is really just naming different things in his immediate vicinity. He then elongates the vowel in *ate* to generate as much suspense as possible before revealing the victim of the monster's meal.

Another excellent example of Reverie's repetitive rhythms comes in the form of a story about his sister:

> *And something was falling on somebody head*
>
> *And my sister was crying*
>
> *But my daddy didn't give her the money*
>
> *And then he said, he gonna give her the money*
>
> *And she don't know why,*
>
> *And she keep crying*
>
> *And she was mad*
>
> *And get up*
>
> *And said some bad word*

And my older sister said more bad words than her…

And, bugs fall in my sister hair.

In this story, the final vowel of each line is greatly elongated, until the final word "hair" marks the end of the story with a low tone. Interestingly, the end of this story is marked entirely by tone, as the meaning of the words themselves in relation to the rest of the story does little to indicate that the story should end here. Beyond creating a catchy rhythmic pattern to the story, the repeated vowel elongation could be indicating some extra meaning in the story as well. It seems to be reflecting Reverie's evaluation and feelings towards the event he is describing. He is almost rolling his eyes at the whole event he describes, clearly annoyed as the crying goes on and on. Finally, he delightedly speeds up in the last line as the event here marks a change in pace.

Another particularly engaging musical feature of Reverie's stories is his use of sound effects. As he tells stories, he will often add in actual mimicry of the sounds that would occur based on his descriptions of the story. One example of this comes from a story in which Reverie is running away from a cheetah and slips.

I was running so fast, and slipped, then I, then I bumped my head and I went

boom-bong-badabîng-bum!

The sound he creates is completely musical, hopping down in pitch on the *bong,* back up higher than the original pitch on *bing,* and back down again on *bum*. This music serves a number of purposes in this story: creating imagery, comedy, and capturing the attention of the listener. The sound effect functions to describe an entire event surrounding his bumping his head, bringing to mind cartoons in which characters are tumbling down and falling over themselves. Having the pitch alternately rise and fall

repeatedly further fosters the image of a character bumping off of things, up and down, as he falls. This comedic image came across very successfully, bringing other students in the room to tumble over with laughter. His use of sound effects also helps to bring the listener into the story. Including such musical detail in his storytelling is a technique that is once again unique to Reverie in this preschool, and listeners become more engaged as they wait to hear what sound will come next. Furthermore, as the event is being described, listeners are also experiencing it in real time, hearing what the characters would have heard at the moment of the sound effect.

Reverie's use of sound effects could be a means of coping with a limited vocabulary, but he is often able to reiterate what has just happened in his stories using actual words. Interestingly, Reverie's teacher, who is also of Haitian background, also uses sound effects. In one story she tells the class about the day that she *AH!* discovered ants in her room! Reverie and the teacher's sound effects are reminiscent of a particular traditional Haitian storytelling style, including stories about *Bouki* and *Malis*, in which the storyteller will use many sound effects along the way, even incorporating sounds that are not produced with the voice. It is very possible that their personal narrative styles are highly influenced by these folktales. Whatever the cause, Reverie is clearly developing a rhythmic and musical style to his storytelling that takes the listener beyond the words and into the story itself.

Performative Style

A final aspect of storytelling that Reverie is developing is the ability to cater to his audience – to perform a story rather than simply tell it. He does this in a number of ways, not only through his imagery and music, as has been shown, but he also engages

his audience through comedic self-deprecation and including audience members in the actual stories.

Reverie's stories, while generally fictional and always fantastical, more often than not will feature himself as a main or at least very important character. He seems to have no qualms using himself as the butt of a joke or portraying himself as a bumbling, clumsy character in the name of comedy. In one of his earliest stories, Reverie describes himself repeatedly falling:

> *I jumped like this SO high and then I landed and then I bumped my head on the door. And then landed on my face. And then… [the door] opened by itself and I fell on my head.*

Repeatedly, Reverie is evoking images of himself falling over and hurting himself as the consequence of a very high jump. He tells this story with a smile on his face, clearly aiming for the universally appreciated slapstick humor involving physical pain. Returning to his story about outrunning a cheetah, told a while after the previous story, Reverie once again describes himself bumping his head and comedically falling all over the place through his sound effect.

Including audience members in the story is a sure way to get the audience's attention, and Reverie clearly came to realize this as the semester progressed. Here is an example:

> *Reverie: Patrick was walking with his mommy, and then he went like "Kadee-oh!"*
>
> *Patrick: (delighted laugh) What! Why you said that… That is so funny!*

Reverie: And Patrick was like… Patrick was like sayin "what the!", Patrick's

mom was sayin "Hatta", then the fireman took the pie and punched him in his

face.

Despite ending up with a pie in his face, Patrick, along with all the other present students, was absolutely overcome with laughter. Even though Reverie describes Patrick as saying and doing crazy things, the effect works perfectly to engage the listeners and bring delight to the classroom. Reverie's ability to perform for the whole class will prepare him for future skills beyond artistry and literacy, such as public speaking and taking on leadership roles.

Through his wild, winding stories, it can be argued that Reverie is working on developing a whole host of literary and narrative devices. He creates vivid imagery, using devices such as metaphor, intensifiers, and repetition. He creates musical and rhythmic patterns through his prosody, repetition, and sound effects. He engages the audience through including them in his tales and using comedic self-deprecation. Reverie is on the path to developing an artistic, comedic, and engaging narrative style that could capture the imaginations of many listeners to come. Unfortunately, Reverie's atypical storytelling style paired with his ability to talk for days if allowed to do so has led the teachers in the classroom to frequently cut him off and overlook the various skills that he is working on rather than supporting and encouraging his development of these skills. He is rarely given a chance to work on them or share them with the class, and indeed is seen as behind in his abilities, as has been mentioned by his teacher.

Reverie's Style and Background

Although many influences contribute to a person's narrative style, it is probable that Reverie's storytelling style is influenced by the Haitian Creole language and folktales that he hears in his home. Haitian Creole is a language "full of proverbs, jokes, word-play, and metaphor…[and] notable for its energy" (Ballenger, 1999, p.22). Storytelling has been a central part of the culture for centuries, with a characteristic format and style that include many of the skills that Reverie shows in his own stories. One particular type of story is known as *Cric Crac.* Traditionally, the storyteller will begin a tale by saying *"cric"* and if the audience is interested in hearing the story, they will respond with *"crac"* (Wolkstein, 1978). Right from the start, and throughout the story, these tales require audience participation and interaction. The stories often include songs, acting, gestures, and occasionally even dancing (Oscarsson, 1992; Ballenger, 1999; Wolkstein, 1978). Storytellers are encouraged to add embellishments of their own, although not too many, as the listeners generally know the stories well and will notice if the story being told gets too far off track. One popular cast of characters in these stories are *Bouki* and *Malis*, who typically get into humorous situations, and once again, their telling involves a great deal of gestures, facial expressions, and audience interaction with the text. The skills that Reverie is working on, from building vivid imagery, to creating musical and rhythmic patterns, to incorporating the audience in his stories, are all found in these traditional Haitian Creole folktales.

The inclusion of this sort of story in the classroom is recommended as a means of better engaging and incorporating Reverie's narrative expectations into the classroom, as well as helping him to build the connection to literacy skills. In 1992, Oscarsson ran an

experiment in a highly Haitian populated classroom. Over a period of three months, traditional Haitian storytelling was included in the curriculum with the goal of helping the students connect to literature and increase writing productivity. When Bouki and Malis made their appearance in the classroom, the children were immediately delighted and jumped in with all the appropriate questions, miming, expressions, gestures, and audience participation. The study found that while self-esteem remained high before and after the project, the amount of writing produced doubled over the course of the study and critical thinking skills were also enhanced. Bringing traditional Haitian folktales and other culturally relevant stories would be extremely beneficial for Reverie, who generally prefers to avoid books and writing.

In examining Reverie's narrative style, it is important to address the role that context plays in the stories that he tells. In the context of the sharing time activity, as set up for the present study, Reverie consistently told stories using his performative and musical style that reflects these traditional Haitian folktales. However, he was also able to tell stories that were more reminiscent of the topic-centered style that is often expected in schools. Particularly, after getting in trouble or in fights with other students and being asked to explain himself, Reverie would very clearly outline the event as he experienced it, with little embellishment or additions of his usual flair. This indicates that Reverie, like many people, is developing the ability to make use of multiple narrative styles and switch from one register to another when necessary. When asked specifically to tell a *story,* however, as was the case in the sharing time sessions, it is clear that he understands this term and context to allow for his wild and winding narrative style that has been described in this paper.

Reactions to Reverie's Stories

While it has hopefully been shown from the analysis of Reverie's stories that he is working on valuable skills that reflect his cultural background, the teacher and other students in the classroom, as well as his own family, have mixed reactions to his tales. The teacher will frequently stop him mid-story, telling him to stop talking and start listening. Even when Reverie is telling stories to other adults, the teacher will sometimes overhear his storytelling and come over to tell him not to talk so much. Interestingly, despite asking him to stop, the teacher shares many of Reverie's developing stylistic tendencies in her own storytelling. Many of the students share the teacher's approach to Reverie's stories and will interrupt him during his stories or simply walk away in the middle. Others love to go along for the wacky ride and even appear to be picking up skills from him, as will be shown. When ignored, Reverie becomes very visibly frustrated, but when attended to, he flourishes. Despite the frequent shutting down, Reverie is fairly resilient and has not yet stopped trying to share his stories.

The teacher, of course, is not stopping Reverie because of any ill intent towards him and his narrative development. It is very challenging to acknowledge and incorporate so many different narrative styles in one classroom. One possible explanation for her reaction to his verbosity is her Haitian background and her expectation that school should be a place for students to listen and teachers to teach. This view of school as a formal setting in which teachers hold ultimate authority and students rarely initiate interactions is common in the Haitian community (Ballenger, 1999). While little knowledge has been gathered as to how storytelling works in Reverie's home beyond hearing his family refer to him as a chatterbox, the family's expectations for his

conduct in the classroom are presumably the same. In the classroom, Reverie's family is quick to cut him off when he tells stories. One day, during which the families of the students were invited to the classroom, Reverie's mother came to watch her son for a few hours. When Reverie began telling a story about the toy sharks he was playing with, his mother came over and told him to stop talking so much because school time is meant for him to listen to the teacher.

It is also interesting to look briefly at the teacher's definition of what a story is and the kind of story that she will often tell to the class and other teachers. During one sharing time session, the teacher defined a story as "something that happens to you before, maybe its something that happened to you yesterday, maybe its something that happened to your parents or to your friends". This definition is actually open to many of the narrative styles that have been illustrated in the literature. Here she does not explicitly require a beginning, middle, and end, or evaluation. In practice, however, she does generally ask children to specify these elements. When telling her own stories, she has several similar elements to those that Reverie is currently working on. During a discussion about bugs, the teacher shared the following story:

> *At home, in springtime, in my apartment, AH!*
>
> *I see them walking ants, always see all the ants walking passing by,*
>
> *And sometime you know what I did?*
>
> *I sing a song: "The ants go marching one by one, hurrah!"*
>
> *You guys know that song?*

This story used sound effects, with her little yelp at the discovery of ants in her apartment. The flow of the story was musical, including varied prosody and even a sung

line from the song that she was referencing. She was entertaining the audience, not just through the humor of her light-hearted and silly reaction to the ants or her dramatic prosodic variation, but also through facial expressions: a look of shock as she reveals there were ants in her apartment, a big smile upon recalling the song that she sang. Finally, she includes her audience through her questions and having them join her to sing the song at the end. By telling stories such as this, it is possible that despite her tendency to cut Reverie off mid-story, she is modeling much of the style and many of the skills that Reverie is working on for the class.

The other students in the class have varied reactions to Reverie's storytelling. As sharing time progressed throughout the semester, several students started to find his stories tiring, complaining and rolling their eyes when they saw him take the stage. One student even covered his ears and shouted upon hearing Reverie begin a story. These students' own narrative style expectations do not match Reverie's style, and so they find his stories confusing. However, as mentioned earlier, many students also seemed to enjoy his narratives, laughing along and showing clear delight at being included even in the silliest of ways.

Beyond simply enjoying the stories, it seems that some students are actually picking up some of Reverie's techniques and skills. One particular student, Patrick, began the study telling very brief and factual accounts. A typical story went:

I just went swimming and jumped in the pool.

He did not embellish his stories in any way, and tended to stick to one-line stories, even when prompted to tell more. Patrick was one of the students, though, who really enjoyed Reverie's narratives. Throughout the semester, he began to tell longer and more

embellished stories, even picking up the use of metaphor and other similar devices. One story about a dog attack, told directly after Reverie finished telling a story, included the following description:

> *I was going fast!*
>
> *Faster than the dogs!*
>
> *Faster than cheetahs!*
>
> *Faster than gazelles.*

Not only is he using hyperbolic and metaphorical language here, but he is also using repetition as a means of emphasis, which is typical of Reverie's stories. The more time he spends listening to Reverie talk, the more these elements appear in his own storytelling. It is clear that Patrick is learning from Reverie, and other students would certainly learn as well if Reverie were given more opportunity to share and work on his narratives in a public classroom space.

The imagery, rhythm, and performance skills that Reverie is working on through his narratives are valuable not only for his own development, but also for the growth of the rest of the class. Being the first to use many of these skills, Reverie has a valuable contribution to make to the narrative development of his peers. Not only can his fellow students pick up specific narrative skills from him, but the exposure to a different narrative style than their own will also allow them to understand the existence and value of different narrative styles. On a broader scale, having students like Reverie who contribute many varying skills and styles can help to inspire storytelling in the classroom as well as help the teacher and the classroom community learn to celebrate the many means of storytelling that exist.

Comparisons to the literature

Reverie's storytelling style, skills, and experiences in the classroom are reminiscent of many other storytellers and children who have been described in the literature. For example, his style shares many characteristics with the African American working class residents of Trackton, as described by Heath (1983). Their stories are performative, with a strong reliance on the audience, and will continue as long as the audience seems interested. Furthermore, there is often a stronger reliance on prosody than lexical or syntactic items during their storytelling. Reverie is working on skills that are also similar to those described by Gee as being important to an African American student called Leona (1991). Leona was working on poetic devices such as repetition, stylistic variation, and syntactic and semantic parallelism, all of which have made appearances in Reverie's stories. In her storytelling, she was less interested in getting to the point and much more concerned with creating patterns with her language, which we also see with Reverie's repetition and musical and rhythmic style. Furthermore, Gee notes that Leona's teacher did not seem to recognize all of these skills in her stories. This unfortunately seems to be the case in Reverie's situation as well.

Reverie's reaction to being shut down during his storytelling is comparable to Cazden's description of Deena (1988). During sharing time, Deena would not be allowed to finish her stories, and when interviewed, she explained how frustrating this was for her. Reverie, although he has never described himself as such, is clearly frustrated every time he is told to stop talking. He always protests, and when he realizes he will not win, his eyebrows furrow, he folds his arms across his chest and takes a deep breath to try to calm himself down. A much more ideal situation for Reverie would be that of Griffin's

David (2004). David told stories that he called "jokes", which were dramatically and linguistically engaging, bringing imagery, metaphor, and linguistic play to the center through their loose structure. The "jokes" then developed into what were called "I need people" stories. These stories included members of the audience as key characters, which is another favorite technique of Reverie's. Griffin argues that these stories represent a real intellectual work, and this recognition on the part of Griffin led to the creation of a regular class activity that supported and promoted the skills that David was developing. Griffin used sharing time as a space for students to learn from each other, and many of the other students in his class began to adopt David's famous "I need people" stories and incorporate David's stylistic devices into both their oral and written stories. In Reverie's classroom, we see the beginnings of this kind of influence in Patrick's stories, but a regular sharing time session such as the one run by Griffin would be more beneficial.

Lessons from Reverie

There is much to be learned from Reverie's stories and situation in his preschool. He is developing many useful and artistic literary skills, some of which are unique to him in the context of his preschool and all of which are characteristic of well-documented and culturally embedded narrative styles. However, as mentioned earlier, he is rarely given a chance to work on them or share them with the class, and the teachers have commented on his struggles in developing narrative and literate skills. All preschoolers are in the process of developing and improving their narrative skills, and Reverie is no exception, but his successes and skills should not be discounted. As Gee puts it, "how could a child bring a language practice to school that was so socio-historically and culturally

recognizable and significant and yet, nonetheless, could be construed as a failure, indeed a failure at language?" (2015, p.11) Reverie is not failing at storytelling, but rather his teacher does not have or take the time to listen to his successes. There are ways to work with students such as Reverie; ways which should be made clear to teachers. When faced with a multicultural classroom and discrepant storytellers such as Reverie, awareness of the multiplicity of legitimate narrative styles that can exist should be one of the first steps for the teacher. Once teachers are aware of the styles and skills developing around them, they will be better able to capitalize on the different culturally influenced styles and practices that their students bring from home into the classroom. Finally, teachers can implement sharing time as a space for group learning and incorporating the diverse narrative styles and skills that students are developing into the regular classroom curriculum.

Importance of Teacher Awareness

When working in a multicultural classroom, it is important for teachers to take into account the various perspectives that may exist there. Teachers bring ideas about what makes a good story from their own narrative background, but these notions are not the same for every student and even every teacher. Expectations are different depending on where you come from. Take for example an experiment in which a recording of a topic-associating story was played for both White and African American listeners (Cazden, 1988). While most White listeners decided it was poorly told and commented on many problems they heard in the story's format and flow, most of the African American listeners said it was a good story. This demonstrates that people will bring their culturally specific background to the table when assessing a student's narrative

skills and development. Expectations for the style in which a narrative is told are not universal. To quote McCabe: "Cultural differences in how to tell stories are as much a part of accent as are differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax. Yet few people hear differences in storytelling styles as part of accent. Instead, they sometimes dismiss stories from different cultures as simply not making sense, as if that property were an objective, culture-free one" (1997, p.461). Simply being aware of the existence of diverse narrative styles will remind teachers to listen more closely to the stories their students tell and try to find the skills they are building rather than the assumed mistakes they are making.

Furthermore, if teachers do not first recognize the value and legitimacy of different cultural styles, their students will not either. Teachers, particularly in the preschool classroom, are role models and have such influence in shaping the experiences and perspectives of their young students. Basil Bernstein once said, "if the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher" (1972, p.149). This quote not only applies directly to the issue of understanding and accepting students' native storytelling styles, but can also be extended further. A teacher must model his or her understanding and respect of the diversity in the classroom so that these, too, become a part of the child's consciousness. Storytellers from different backgrounds can face alienation in a classroom that does not recognize or accept their form of speaking, as in McCabe's example of the students who, when attempting to help fellow students format narratives more along their personal expectations, ended up being seen as bullies (1992). Even when it is not as serious as bullying, students can become frustrated by the classroom's

negative response and ultimately give up, as was the case with Cazden's Deena (1988) and is beginning to be the case with Reverie. The teacher's influence on his or her students and the classroom is great, and awareness of the multiplicity of possible narrative styles is a first step towards building a more effective and inclusive classroom environment.

Whether through a greater focus on cultural anthropology in teacher preparation programs, or in-class research into the backgrounds of the students, it is crucial that this awareness be promoted. Teachers can further develop their knowledge of students' home cultures by getting to know families better and starting conversations about children's lives at home. A simple change in the classroom culture can also be effective. By letting students know that they are interested, teachers can create a classroom environment in which students feel free to bring their home culture and experiences to the class, and can get to know students' home cultures and expectations better through the students themselves.

Capitalizing on Different Cultures

Beyond being cognizant and respectful of the existence of students' different narrative styles, teachers can be active in trying to understand and include their students' styles in the classroom. McCabe's (1997) rule of thumb for approaching unfamiliar narrative styles is a good approach:

- Assume there is a form instead of a lack of form

- Write the stories down so that you can reflect more later

- Give beginning readers stories that make sense to them, even if it is their own story in written form

When faced with unfamiliar narrative styles, teachers must listen more carefully and try to reflect more thoroughly to see whether or not a student's story is in fact using an unexpected form. Catching oneself acting on personal narrative expectations can be difficult, but is important to the ultimate narrative development of the student.

The third point in McCabe's rule of thumb is also key in helping students develop their literacy skills and make the connection from oral storytelling to written stories. Matching students' oral narrative styles with books in the classroom can help children better relate to literature. In her experiment bringing traditional Haitian storytelling into a classroom populated heavily by Haitians, Oscarsson found that drawing upon the students' background knowledge of the oral tradition by working with traditional Haitian stories led students to make the vital connection between print and oral language (1992). Indeed, the inclusion of diverse narrative styles in the classroom library can be helpful even for variation within cultures. As McCabe puts it, "inclusion of stories from diverse cultures may result in a more likely match for those children whose cultural storytelling values are very different from or even at odds with their individual ones" (1997, p.455). Education is about building upon and expanding what students already know, so the inclusion of diverse narrative styles in the classroom literature is an excellent way to help a class of individual children with different, individual experiences connect to literacy.

Finally, teachers should be explicit about the differences that can exist in narrative style – this is not a sensitive secret from which students must be protected. There are many different ways to tell a good story, and children deserve to be made aware of that fact. Speaking explicitly about narrative diversity can help cultivate open-mindedness and understanding, as well as help develop different narrative abilities through the

explicit discussion of how these styles function and compare with one another. McCabe actually calls for a full fifth of the school year to be devoted to stories from the major groups in the classroom, with explicit discussion of the structures and styles of each group (1997). While many students roll their eyes at Reverie and do not give him the chance to show what he is working on, perhaps they would let him talk if they understood what he was trying to do and that it is a widely accepted form of speech. Being explicit extends to literacy as well. Gee asserts that "we should not hide the social geography of talk and text, but make this geography overt… the study of literacy is about how talk and text are socially distributed as founding elements of our social lives and institutions" (2015, p.13).

Sharing Time as a Space for Learning

An excellent space for explicit classroom discussion of storytelling style and practicing narrative skills is sharing time. In Reverie's school, there was no sharing time at all until the study was performed, and it has not been adopted into the regular curriculum after the period of data collection. Thus there is no space for Reverie and his classmates to develop narrative skills in the current schooling structure. Even when sharing time was introduced to the classroom, the teacher often used it as a time to dictate narrative rules rather than build upon developing skills. A typical sharing time led by the teacher went as such:

> *Teacher: Come here please, let me help Zachary to put a story together. Ok, what your story's about Zachary?*
>
> *Zach: About the book*
>
> *Teacher: What's the book was about?*

Zach: Choo-choo train

Teacher: So what happened?

Zach: We read it and, and, and I opened the book

After probing further about the plot of the actual book, the teacher eventually gave up and summed it up to the class as being a story about a train. Rather than letting Zachary talk and take the story in the direction he wanted to, the teacher interrupted him with leading questions. In his story, it seems that Zachary was perhaps more interested in his actual experience reading the book, while the teacher wanted him to recall the plot of the book that was read. The teacher has many responsibilities to the children, one of which is to prepare them for the school-based narrative style that they will repeatedly encounter in the future, thus she was certainly acting with the students' best interest in mind. This type of scaffolding was helpful for many of the students, who would not speak at all unless the teacher led them. Some students though, Reverie in particular, were annoyed by the teacher's attempts to scaffold and would have preferred greater freedom in their storytelling. The only reason that so much data was gathered from Reverie was that the methodology of the study allowed him the space to talk freely. A combination of teacher guided storytelling for those who prefer it and free reign for others to develop stories in a way that makes sense to them could be a more effective way to run sharing time. Furthermore, sharing time can help to create a classroom environment in which narrative speech is not seen as a lower form of language but rather celebrated and acknowledged for its many uses.

Conclusion

Reverie and his fellow students constitute a prime example of what a multicultural preschool class can look like and the diversity of narrative styles that can exist in one classroom. The students in this class are on their way to developing several of the different narrative styles described in the literature, from the topic-centered narratives typically expected in schools to topic-associating stories. The analysis of Reverie's stories reveals not only his stylistic similarities both to topic-associating stories as well as traditional Haitian Creole folktales, but also a number of valuable skills related to performance and literacy. In his storytelling, Reverie is working on creating imagery, rhythmic and musical patterns, and performing for the audience. Through his use of metaphorical speech, dramatic intensifiers, and purposeful repetition, Reverie is developing the ability to paint rich scenes in the minds of the audience. The rhythm of his stories, paired with varying prosody and sound effects, which bring the audience into the moment he describes, are helping him to develop musical and poetic aspects of his style. Through these skills, as well as his inclusion of the audience, Reverie's stories become stories in and of themselves. The skills he is working on resemble those demonstrated by many of the cases described in the literature on narrative development.

Unfortunately, Reverie finds himself in a classroom that does not offer him a space to work on the skills he is developing through his narratives. Like many cases described in the literature, Reverie has a teacher who tends to cut him off and many classmates who do not enjoy his stories in part because they do not yet know how to understand them. It is very challenging for a teacher to be able to incorporate such diverse narrative styles into a regular curriculum, but steps can be taken to acknowledge

the value of the style and skills Reverie is developing. Such steps include creating a space for Reverie to tell his stories, talking explicitly about different narrative styles with the class, and recording Reverie's stories in print form to help him connect to a world of literature that does not represent his own narrative expectations. Not only would these steps aid his own personal development, but they would also contribute to the development of his fellow students. Reverie's narratives have been shown to be beneficial for those students who listen, as these students pick up some of his skills such as metaphorical speech and expressive use of prosody. A space in the classroom such as the sharing time created by Griffin and his students (2004) would provide the means for Reverie to continue working on his style and to share his skills with the rest of the class.

The present study displays the case of just one student in one classroom, and much more research is called for into the fields of multicultural narrative styles, their implications on narrative development, and the use of sharing time in preschool classrooms. Particularly, the narrative style of members of the Haitian community can be better described and more experiments must be conducted on the process of development of such narratives in young speakers. Furthermore, additional trial programs of the sharing time activity presented in this paper and previous literature should be run in classrooms of great cultural diversity such as the classroom in which this study was conducted. Much research has been done into classrooms with just one or two different narrative styles present, but the preschool in this study introduces the need to explore best practices when a much higher number of different cultures come together and interact in a school setting.

To quote Dell Hymes, "most educators would agree with the principle that teaching should start where the child is. Few appear to recognize that to do so requires knowledge of the community from which the child comes" (1996, p.106). In order to continue growing and learning, students must feel that what they have to say is valued by others. As teachers in diverse classrooms, we will not always have the time or ability to fully understand every child's home culture, but we can become aware of the existence of these different styles of speech. We can endeavor to take the time to really listen to our students as they share their lives with us and look deeper into the skills they are building rather than the expectations they may not be meeting. It could turn out, after all, that our students have something big to share. *Bigger than bubblecheeks!*

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Appendix

Selected Stories told by Reverie throughout the data collection period:

1.

Jenn: Do you have a story Reverie?

Reverie: Yeah

Jenn: tell us your story

Reverie: someone (unintelligible) went to the *doctor* (unintelligible) the *bathroom*

Jenn: oh, then what happened?

Reverie: medicine made him feel better

Jenn: medicine can do that, huh

Reverie: then we went back to the place

Jenn: you went back to the place?

Reverie: yeah, they had rice

Jenn: what?

Reverie: they had *rice!*

Jenn: ooh yum

2.

Reverie: I was at my house and they had candles

Me: they had candles?

Reverie: *no*

Me: no?

Reverie: and my other birthday they had candles and lots of juice and beans?

   (Name) was here, and my little sister was here and one people was here

Me: and people were there?

Reverie: yeah one

Me: hmm

Reverie: and I'm gonna have a mask teenage mutant ninja turtles

Me: teenage mutant ninja turtles?

Reverie: yeah and Matt. And Amar.

4.

Reverie: There was a cat, and then it scratched me and it scratched my sister and my sister was *cryin* and *cryin* but I didn't cry oh no

5.

Reverie: I haaad a (unintelligible) and it can light up

Jenn: it can light up?

Reverie: Actually… I had a Reverie, and I was just flying, I was flying

Jenn: flying?

Reverie: yeah, with nothing.

6.

Reverie: trick or treat

      Smell my feet

      Give me something good to eat

      If you don't, I don't care

      I'll pull down my underwear

7.

Reverie: I have a big cat and it's so cooool

Me: it's so cool? Why is it cool?

Reverie: it was dead somebody

Me: it was what?

Reverie: it was just dead somebody, it had no friends… it was dead somebody, and it had all the hair

Me: *all* the hair?

Reverie: yeah he died.

Me: oh he died, oh I'm sorry

Patrick: In the first day, in the ten day, I just got in Halloween

Reverie: and the cat just lights up, the cat's eyes, like the video, and you gonna get dead from Ebola

Me: Ebola?

Reverie: yeah

Me: I don't think anybody here has Ebola

Reverie: and you get somebody's black, somebody's tears

Me: oh no

Reverie: You gonna get dead from Ebola see your blood here (points to paint drops on my shoes)

8.

Reverie: My big sister is so crazy

Me: Your sister is so crazy?

Reverie: No, my bigger sister is

Me: Your bigger sister?

Reverie: (unintelligible)

Me: can you say that louder?

Reverie: She like she phone, and she like (unintelligible), and she like her school…

Teacher: Reverie is talking about his older sister which is a teenager, sometimes teenagers act differently… we can talk about that some more later

9.

Reverie: two people just ate some buuuuugs

Jenn: two people just ate some bugs?

Reverie: yeah Albert and he ate a big bug uhm

Jenn: a big bug?

Reverie: yeah and it was black

Jenn: black?

Reverie: it also looked like a spider

Jenn: a spider?

Reverie: yeah and it was black

Reverie: and when I was stepping on the and it came to a spider, a little spider

Jenn: when you stepped on an ant it became a spider?

Reverie: yeah it was a little spider

Jenn: a little spider

Reverie: yeah and I was telling my friends

10.

Reverie: I have a story!!

Me: yeah Reverie

Reverie: and something was fallin on somebody heaaaaad

     And my sister was crying

     And my daddy didn't give her the moneeeeeeey

     And then he said, he gonna give her the moneeeeeeey

     But she don't know whyyy,

     and she keep cryinnnn

     And she was maaaaad

     And she get uuup

     And said somebody woooord

     And my older sister (unintelligible)

     And my bugs fall in my sister hair.

11.

Reverie: I have a teacher, gonna come, come talk together

     Uhm, and a big monster ate Jennifer.

Jenn: a big muffin ate Jennifer?

Reverie: no a big monster

     I was putting some smoothie and milk

     It turned into a ghost. monster

     Then it turned into a ant then it turned into a spider turned into a snake turned into

a Jennifer

Jenn: turned into me?

Reverie: and turned into a shoes and a pants and a skin and a face and a nose AND either

he… either the monster ateeeeeee… Jasmin!

Jenn: the monster ate Jasmin!

Reverie: aaaaand Nate

Jenn: and Nate

Reverie: and Patrick

Jenn: oh my gosh and Patrick!

Reverie: and the big monster ate… the big, big Dinosaur's house.

Jenn: ate the dinosaur's house?

Reverie: and he ate the gate too the dinosaur free then… then then then

Patrick: uhhh, Jenn?

Reverie: then the fireman dancing (?) so he went in the car and he broke his car

　　　Then he went to a mud, he went to a mud, and then he broke a phone like that

Jenn: is that it?

Reverie: and Patrick was walking with his mommy, and then he went like "Kadee-oh!"

Patrick: (delighted laugh) What! Why do you said that!

Reverie: and then

Jenn: what does that mean?

Patrick: that is so funny!! That is so funny

Reverie: and Patrick was like…. Patrick was like sayin "what the!", Patrick's mom was

sayin "Hatta", then the fireman took the pie and punched him in his face.

(Patrick laughs and laughs)

Jenn: oh my goodness

Reverie: then ??? 2:17… aaaaand Jasmin monster and Bill, and Nate

Teacher: ok Reverie let someone else have a turn now

12.

Reverie: my turn!

Jenn: we'll give Reverie another turn.. you have another story?

Reverie: I've got four stories

Jenn: four stories! ok

Reverie: so, I was like walking in the pond, and the hippo there

Jenn: the pond?

Reverie: and then the shark, two sharks, the white shark and the blue shark, it jumped!

But the white shark, not the blue shark, the blue shark couldn't swim

Then it jumped, then it supposed to eat it, then I jumped out of the pool so high, then I hit

them in the face

Jenn: you hit the shark in the face?

Patrick and Nate are cracking up

Reverie: then, then I turned and walked, and the white one, the baddest one is the white

one

Jenn: the wet one?

Reverie: the white one is the bad one

Nate: and the blue one is the nice one?

Reverie: the blue one is the nice one, but he ate, he can ate the peoples

　　　The other shark is uhm dangerous, and dolphins so funny.

Jenn: Dolphins are funny. First story? You have another one?

13.

Reverie: So I was walking, I was climbing up a window, so Matthias, hit, uh, he got a rock, and threw it at somebody's window. Then he broke, the, the glass, then he the police, then he run at the dumpster, go home, then the police was like he got, then Matthias, then the police gonna come get him, and my other one! I was at my big sister's house, and me and my friend Junior, then the police came and got me.

Jenn: police got you?

Reverie: he was throwing me so high

Jenn: so high?

Reverie: yeah.

14.

Reverie: uhhh, I was and the bugs

and a spider was crawlin

then the spider ate all the people

then he pick the big cheeks, like (something)

bigger than bubble cheeks!

Bigger bigger bigger bigger!

Then it can like either come out

Then it pop pop pop pop down

Then, then Robin was in the pool

Then, with shark!

Then biking and biking and biking and biking EV.RY.WHERE.

15.

Reverie: I was going soo fast, like so fast, then I was speeding, then the cheetah was behind me, then yeah I was running so fast, and slipped, then I, then I bumped my head and I went boom-bong-badabing-bum!

Everyone laughs

Reverie: then a big big big (unintelligible)… then he make me clack-clack-clack, then he make me slow down, then faster, then broke a rice

Jenn: broke on rice?

Reverie: yeah broke the rice then it broke… a racecar

16.

Reverie: I was and then the cheetah, and I see the cheetah speed behind me, and then I run so fast, and then I fly… I fly like a lizard

Jenn: like a lizard?

Reverie: yeah, and like a bird… and then I turn into an animal, first when we turn into the animal and then we turned to the mosquito and then drink somebody's blood, name was Samantha, my sister's name is Samantha