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CLASSROOM INFLUENCES ON FIRST-GRADE STUDENTS' ORAL NARRATIVES

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As a part of a longitudinal project examining first-grade reading instruction in 4 districts across the state of Texas, this study explored the nature of students' oral narratives and the connections between teachers' instructional practices and students' narratives. Using an adaptation of Hudson & Shapiro's (1991) narrative categories, we examined 166 narratives generated by first-grade students, categorizing each as an event-script, a less-developed narrative, a well-developed narrative, or an "other." An exemplar narrative from each of the 4 categories and 2 other narratives that represented the diversity of student responses and the complexity of the relationships between student performance and teacher practices were selected for further analysis. Six case studies were developed to describe students' school achievement, their oral narratives, and teachers' practices. Our findings suggest that certain classroom practices, which either support or narrow opportunities for engagement with oral and written text, may be an important influence on students' construction of oral narratives. The individual cases provide examples of ways in which students' narrative constructions are embedded in a variety of classroom features such as teacher attitudes and practices.

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BRUNER (1990) SUGGESTED that narrative is the central organizing feature of human culture. McCabe (1996) pointed to four important functions of stories and personal narratives for children: (a) making sense of experiences, (b) portraying roles played by various characters in stories, (c) making past events present and abstract events more vivid, and (d) forging relationships and facilitating language skills. Studies investigating children's understanding and use of narrative have focused on the developmental nature of genre knowledge, cultural differences that influence children's storytelling, and relationships between oral and written language.

In examining the nature of children's knowledge of narrative, Applebee (1978) found children's concept of story began at a very early age. In their study of preschool children, first graders, and third graders, Hudson and Shapiro (1991) found increased sophistication with age in the use of narrative genres. Not surprisingly, older students created longer narratives; used more structural elements such as introductions, endings, and sequencing of events; and produced more cohesive stories than younger children. Although background knowledge and cohesion were more in evidence with age, both were affected by the topic and task. Other research that examined the effects of various types of narrative tasks suggested that children as young as first grade can shift their ways of telling stories to fit differing task demands (Hicks, 1991). Further, young children are capable of producing a striking variety of narrative forms from personal anecdotes to retellings to original fantasies (Preece, 1987).

Factors affecting knowledge about narrative other than developmental ones include sociocultural factors, including home background. Gee (1989) has suggested that genre knowledge is linked to cultural values. Opportunities for engaging in particular genre forms vary by cultural group and social class (Heath, 1983, 1986). For example, McCabe (1996) found that European American families often exchange personal narratives at the dinner table; these narratives are often focused on action plots told in sequence with a clear beginning, middle, and end. In contrast, many African American children's stories reflect the tradition of telling dramatic, lengthy stories that embellish fact in the interest of creative expression; stories are intended to be performed and draw on poetic devices such as metaphor, alliteration, and rhyme. Some Latino children emphasize description and de-emphasize sequencing; stories often center around extended family members and their narratives may overlap with others. Peterson (1994) found social class differences in narratives told by ethnically and culturally homogeneous groups. These differences in culture and social class are reflected in individual's storytelling styles in school settings. For example, Michaels (1981) demonstrated the differences between African American and European American students' styles during sharing time and noted

that the teacher valued European American topic-centered discourse style over the topic-associated style of some of the African American girls. Together, this body of research suggests that culture and social class influence the forms and functions of narratives of members of diverse social and cultural groups.

Home experiences such as storybook reading can enhance children's developing sense of narrative (Teale, 1986). The nature of the parent-child exchange also influences both the quantity and quality of children's narratives. Some parents extend their children's narratives through elicitation and elaboration, whereas other parents ask few, simple questions and switch from topic to topic. Parents can be taught to encourage more elaborate narratives from their children (Peterson, Jesso, & McCabe, 1999).

With increased interest in emergent literacy, the relationships between oral and written language and reading and writing have been emphasized (Irwin & Doyle, 1992; Taylor, 1983; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). The ability to produce decontextualized speech plays an important role in becoming literate (Olson, 1977). Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) have summarized a number of studies that demonstrated the close linkage between language skills and reading skills for children entering school. One of the best predictors of later school success for students who are at risk for learning problems is their narrative skills before entering school (Paul & Smith, 1993). However, the demands of producing narratives in the school context are quite different from those important at home (Crais & Lorch, 1994). Additionally, the transition from oral to written language is quite complex (Morrow, 1985; Sulzby, 1985). Because narrative skills are so essential for literacy acquisition, it makes sense for teachers to provide opportunities for students to produce oral narratives in the school context. However, few opportunities exist in classrooms for students to tell stories, and then these moments tend to be restricted to specific "show-and-tell" formats (Cazden, 1988). Because so few opportunities exist in classrooms for storytelling, little research has been conducted to examine the relationships between classroom practices and the oral narratives students produce. Our study provides an opportunity to understand classroom practices that might contribute to students' development of narrative and offers insight into children's narratives as a guidepost for the transition from oral to written language.

We know from previous research that the nature of classroom materials and the types of instructional practices influence student learning (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Hoffman, 1991). Studies that have examined classroom materials and students' written narratives have found a link between them (Morrow, 1985; Sulzby, 1985). Eckhoff (1984) found that children who read materials that included more elaborate text structures were

more likely to use those text features in their own written narratives than students who were exposed to a more skills-based, traditional basal-reader format. More recently, Hoffman et al. (1998) found that teachers' epistemological orientations and teaching contexts affected their adaptations of materials. Our study built both on work examining children's narratives and research focusing on instruction and describes the connections between teachers' instructional practices and the students' construction of oral narratives. Our research question was: What is the relationship between teachers' classroom practices and the oral narratives children produce?

Method

As part of a larger, longitudinal project examining first-grade language arts practices, our study focused on students' oral narratives. In order to provide an overall context for the data that were collected, we have drawn from the larger study. First, we provide information about the larger study and then we present our methods of data collection for the portion of the study focused on oral narratives.

Larger Longitudinal Study

Teacher Data

Participants. Teachers in this study were drawn from four districts spread over a 300-square mile area of south-central Texas and selected because they represented a variety of teaching contexts. District 1, a large, urban district with 65 elementary schools, served a diverse community (both ethnically and economically). District 2, a small, rural district with only three elementary schools, served a working-class and middle-class community of European Americans and Latino Americans. District 3, a very large, urban district, served an economically disadvantaged community with the vast majority of students in its 174 elementary schools of minority background and on free/reduced lunch. Finally, District 4, a large suburban district with 37 elementary schools, served a community in transition. Until recently, this district served a primarily European American student population drawn from middle to upper-middle income homes. The community now serves an ethnically and economically diverse population.

Two schools from each of the four districts were identified by district officials. Two teachers volunteered from each school giving us a total of 16 teachers for our analysis; 14 continued into the second year, and 2 changed assignments and thus were dropped from the study. In terms of background, the teachers in our sample ranged from one first-year teacher to a teacher

with 28 years teaching experience at the first-grade level. The average in this sample was around 8 years teaching experience. Eleven of the 14 teachers were European American, 2 were African American, and 1 was Latino American. (See Hoffman et al., 1998, and McCarthy et al., 1994, for summaries of these teachers.) Table 1 displays the sample of teachers for the larger study. The teachers who are featured in the smaller study of children's oral narrative are noted in the table; they represented all four districts: 2 from District 1, 1 from District 2, 2 from District 3, and 1 from District 4.

Sources of data. The research team of the larger, longitudinal study consisted of the two co-directors of the project and six graduate research assistants. Each member of the team worked with two of the sample teachers. The analysis drew on classroom observations and interviews gathered for 2 years. Each teacher was interviewed at least three times each year and was observed teaching reading a minimum of three times each year. Several additional "mini-observations" were conducted on days when we visited school sites to conduct student assessments resulting in a total of six to nine observations per teacher. Table 2 provides an overview of the sources of teacher data used for the larger study.

The interviews were structured to focus on teachers' beliefs about reading and their perceptions of students. Specifically, the interview framework consisted of questions about (a) their overall literacy practices, (b) sources of influence on developing their beliefs, (c) learning goals for students, (d) grouping practices, (e) descriptions of individual learners including their ability levels and home backgrounds, and (f) attributions for student success or failure. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

The audiotaped observations were designed to document teaching practices including grouping, materials use, skills lessons, and guided reading procedures. To augment the audiotaped information, we kept field notes of reading practices including teacher-student interactions, classroom organization and grouping patterns, use of materials, and student responses. Following each site visit, observation reports were generated using the field notes and audiotapes.

Analysis. Data analysis began following each observation and interview, as we (individually) reviewed sources of information to identify recurring themes and patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Subsequent interviews and observations were adapted to focus on emerging themes such as the role of the teacher, the use of materials, grouping, skills lessons, and guided reading procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Summaries of each of the 14 teachers were constructed around five major areas of concern: (a) context (e.g., school setting), (b) teacher background, (c) instructional practices including materials and uses of them, (d) teacher beliefs about reading including program goals and philosophy, and (e) information about and

Table 1. Participants – Teachers

	<i>Years of experience/ highest degree</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Certification</i>	<i>Instructional approach</i>
<i>District 1</i>				
School 1				
Teacher 1 (Marilyn) ^a	14 / unknown	European American	regular	basal + skills
Teacher 2 (Connie) ^a	5 / bachelor's	European American	regular	literature
School 2				
Teacher 1 (Joy)	28 / unknown	European American	regular	basal + literature
Teacher 2 (Pam)	7 / bachelor's	European American	regular	literature
<i>District 2</i>				
School 1				
Teacher 1 (Sharon) ^a	12 / bachelor's	European American	regular	basal + literature
Teacher 2 (Diane)	2 / bachelor's	European American	regular	basal + skills
School 2				
Teacher 1 (Danielle)	1 / bachelor's	European American	regular	basal + skills
Teacher 2 (Nona)	6 / bachelor's	Latino American	alternative certification program/ bilingual	basal + skills
<i>District 3</i>				
School 1				
Teacher 1 (Pat) ^a	13 / bachelor's	African American	bilingual	skills
Teacher 2 (Penny) ^a	8 / bachelor's	African American	regular	basal
School 2				
Teacher 1 (Marge)	3 / bachelor's	European American	regular	literature
Teacher 2 (Mary) ^b	11 / bachelor's	European American	alternative certification program	basal + skills
<i>District 4</i>				
School 1				
Teacher 1 (June) ^a	25 / bachelor's	European American	regular	basal + literature
Teacher 2 (Sarah)	25 / master's	European American	regular	basal
School 2				
Teacher 1 (Candace) ^b	10 / bachelor's	European American	regular	basal + literature
Teacher 2 (Renee)	17 / master's	European American	regular	basal

^a Indicates teachers featured in this report.

^b Indicates teachers who changed schools and thus were dropped from the larger, longitudinal study in Year 2.

views of students. Data and tentative interpretations were presented and discussed during weekly meetings of the research team. Next, we placed all teachers along a continuum from predominant isolated skills practice, to reliance on the basal enhanced by additional skills, to extended use of literature and trade books. Each of these teachers had particular practices associated with them in terms of opportunities for students to read and construct written and oral texts. The labels for each category placed an emphasis on materials; however, our intention was to characterize teachers' practices including materials and teachers' uses of them.

Student Data

Participants. Six students from each of the 14 teachers' classrooms were drawn from a hat based on the number of returned permission slips (which were agreements to participate in the study). In the case of the return of only a few permission slips, the teacher and researcher negotiated the student selection, striving to represent the diversity found within the classroom. Selection, when not random, involved balancing gender and including students from various social and ethnic backgrounds and both high and low ability as determined by the teacher.

Data collection/analyses. We used a multi-faceted performance assessment (e.g., code features, meaning construction, and reader response). The individual assessments were conducted during two, 30-minute periods in the spring of first grade. Table 3 describes the student data collected for the larger study.

We analyzed the student data in the following way. For each of the 166 students, we recorded the total number of correctly identified words on the San Diego Quick Assessment, which contains 47 preprimer through second-grade words. The test for phonological awareness was scored from

Table 2. Sources of Data – Teachers

<i>Sources</i>	<i>Description</i>
Interviews, semi-structured	3 approximately 1-hour, audiotaped (early winter, early spring, late spring)
Observations, reading instruction	3 ranging from 45–120 minutes, audiotaped and field notes (early winter, early spring, late spring)
Mini-observations, reading instruction	3–6 approximately 30–60 minutes, field notes
Observation reports	overview of the site visit

Table 3. Sources of Data – Students

Sources	Description
Session 1 (approximately 30 minutes)	
Reader response activity	shared reading of <i>The Grouchy Ladybug</i> by Eric Carle; using open-ended prompts, the researcher recorded student responses
Construction of an oral narrative ^a	using a picture prompt, the researcher recorded student-generated story
Ordered and random letter identification	using uppercase letters, the researcher recorded student responses
Session 2 (approximately 30 minutes)	
Survey, reading attitudes, and habits ^a	using an interview framework, the researcher recorded student responses
Word list reading	using the San Diego Quick Assessment word task (preprimer through grade 3), the researcher recorded student responses
Oral passage reading	using leveled passages (grades 1 and 2), the researcher conducted running record and miscue analysis
Phonological-awareness spelling task	using leveled word list (14 words), the researcher analyzed student responses
Interview, classroom text-focused	using an interview framework, the researcher recorded student responses

^aIndicates sources of data most relevant to oral narrative study.

0 to 4, with 0 assigned when the students' written responses failed to reflect any letters or phonemes, and a score of 4 awarded for conventional spelling. Total points were added together for a single score. The two passages were scored by totaling the number of miscues including insertions, omissions, substitution, mispronunciations and hesitations. The total number of self-corrections and the amount of time to read each passage was also recorded. A fluency rating from 1 to 5, with 1 representing "broken/fragmented with lots of pauses" and 5 representing "smooth reading with interpretive voice" was given. A comprehension score, with 1 being low and 3 being high, was also entered. Means and standard deviations were calculated for all 166 students.

Influences on Oral Narrative Study

The primary focus of this smaller study was relating the construction of an oral narrative to the instructional practices of the teachers. We describe our subset of data and participants below.

We chose to focus on the narratives of children in first grade, because by the age of six most children are able to tell stories that meet the expectations of their cultures, but have not yet developed highly idiosyncratic styles (McCabe, 1996). To understand how students grappled with the problem of transforming “knowing into telling” (White, 1980, p.1), we designed a task that involved creating a story using a picture prompt. We chose to use a picture prompt rather than having children construct a narrative from their own experiences, because we believed that using the same prompt for all 166 students would provide an opportunity to note variation within a bounded task. We also felt that a visual prompt would be an easier task than describing something from memory for most children. The prompt was an $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ picture of a boy waving to a pilot in a bi-wing airplane. The boy, drawn from the rear, revealed only the back of his shirt, the back of his head, and his arms. No facial features were visible. The airplane included a person in the pilot’s position, drawn small which seemed to minimize any distinguishing features. We believed that most young children in the 1990s would be familiar with small airplanes. Selected because of its simplicity, this picture prompt featured few elements and, therefore, promised to welcome imaginative responses.

In a testing area away from the classroom, the researcher showed the student the picture of the boy waving to an airplane and asked the student to think of a story that might go along with the picture. The researcher further explained that the student would first tell the story and would then retell the story so that the researcher could write it down. The initial telling was to serve as a rehearsal for the story to be recorded. Following the recording of the dictated story, the researcher read the story to the student, allowing for confirmation of the recorded story and for clarification or elaboration. Though data collection sessions were audiotaped, researchers did not document variations in the initial telling of a story and the retelling that was written down.

Our secondary source of student data was the interviews conducted with each of the individual students. Interview questions focused on students’ opportunities for literacy learning at home and school. For example, we asked students to tell us about their favorite books at home and school, to describe the setting for reading books, to describe a person who read at home, and to tell us an example of a good reader and what that person did that made him or her a good reader.

Analyses

Oral narratives were collected from 92 students in Year 1 and 74 students

in Year 2 for a total of 166 narratives. We read through all of the students' narratives and sought a coding scheme that could account for the extensive variations we found in the narratives. We adapted Hudson and Shapiro's (1991) more traditional narrative analysis scheme because it (a) allowed us to categorize a large number of narratives using identifiable criteria; (b) had been used previously with preschool, first-grade, and third-grade students; (c) was easily adapted to our sample of students; and (d) included a focus on conventions such as character, plot, and problem resolution that are often aspects of first-grade literacy curriculum.

We created the following categories: (a) event-scripts, (b) less-developed narratives, (c) well-developed narratives, and (d) other. *Event-scripts* were descriptions of the picture itself or an event that the picture might suggest and often used present tense. These narratives did not reflect much structural knowledge of stories nor content. *Less-developed narratives* included some features associated with narrative such as character, event, and some conventions such as a beginning or an ending. These stories were told in past tense. They were distinguished from the more-developed narratives by their lack of coherence or lack of problem or resolution. *Well-developed narratives* were told in past tense, used conventional story elements such as character and plot, and included a problem and resolution. These narratives displayed structural knowledge and content knowledge including information about airplanes or other salient aspects of the picture. Features such as rhythm, "storybook language," or use of dialogue were included in these narratives. The *other* category included pieces that fit other genres better than narrative, such as retellings of recognizable books, lists, or poems, or provided too few words to make any judgment.

Using this framework, we independently categorized each of the 166 narratives. We then compared our ratings and refined our categories. We trained an independent third rater to categorize all 166 narratives and found reliability to be 80%. When we placed our three categories of event-script, less-developed, and well-developed on a continuum and compared ratings, we found that there was never more than one point difference between raters in 97% of the narratives. As a final step, we developed a frequency distribution and calculated percentages of types of narratives that fit each category.

After scoring the student narratives, we looked at the frequency of narrative types (e.g., event-script, less-developed, well-developed, and other) by teacher and recorded the distribution. We used the continuum we had developed from the larger, longitudinal study for Year 1 as the basis for categorizing the teachers. The original continuum showed one teacher in the skills-based instruction category, six in the basal-plus-skills category,

two in the basal only category, four in the basal-plus-literature category, and three in the literature-only category. After eliminating the two teachers who had dropped out of the study, we calculated totals and percentages for each narrative type within each teacher category.

We then drew from the analyses of the larger, longitudinal study to describe the teachers' practices. We particularly focused on opportunities that students had in classrooms to read and produce connected text. We then looked for relationships between the teachers' instruction and the student narratives.

Selection of student cases. We wanted to represent both the narrative continuum and the instructional continuum so we included six cases. First, we looked for examples that were most representative of each narrative category. We selected at least one narrative from each of our three major categories and one from the *other* category to illustrate the variety of factors relevant to narrative construction. We selected two additional cases to represent the diversity of student responses and the range of teacher practices from skills oriented to literature based. Table 4 provides demographic information about the participants we selected as case studies. We used the student interview data to provide some contexts for their literacy learning. We then organized the cases to describe their school achievement, their oral narratives, teachers' attitudes and practices, and a summary of each student.

Results

Results are presented at three levels: (a) frequency distribution and percentages for the four narrative categories; (b) patterns associating teacher practices and student construction of narratives; and (c) six individual cases presenting narratives accompanied by classroom factors that seemed to have influenced the student's narrative.

Table 4. Participants – Focal Students

Student	Age	Ethnicity	Lunch status	Reading group
Caterino ^a	7 years	Latino American	free	middle
LaShaska	6½ years	African American	free	top
Carlos	6½ years	Latino American	regular	middle
Amanda	nearly 7 years	European American	regular	top
Monica	6½ years	Latino American	free	top
Heather	6 years	European American	regular	top

^aHome language of Spanish.

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Findings revealed that 31% ($n = 52$) of the students' narratives fit the *event-script* category; 38% ($n = 63$) fit the *less-developed narrative* category; 28% ($n = 46$) fit the *well-developed narrative* category; and 3% ($n = 5$) fit the *other* category.

When we looked at the frequency of narratives within each category by teacher, we found a trend along the teacher continuum. Table 5 displays the classifications of oral narratives for all 166 students within the five teacher practice categories. The teacher with skills-based instruction had a large number of event scripts and less-developed narratives and no examples of well-developed narratives. The six teachers who used a basal and supplemented instruction with additional skills had more event-scripts and less-developed narratives than they had more-developed narratives. The two teachers who were predominant basal users had more less-developed or well-develop narratives and fewer event-scripts. The four teachers who enhanced their basal instruction with the use of literature also had fewer event-scripts and more less-developed and well-developed narratives. The three teachers who used literature only had a more balanced distribution with less-developed narratives constituting the largest category.

The distributions suggested a trend – students in classrooms with instruction that was predominantly skills-based produced more narratives that were event-scripts and less-developed narratives. We found that these skills-based classrooms provided few opportunities for students to engage with connected text – either written or oral; instruction focused on decoding and word attack strategies. Students in classrooms with basal instruction or basal instruction enhanced by literature produced increasingly more developed narratives. In these basal and basal enhanced by literature classrooms, the teachers read aloud stories to students and offered opportunities for written and oral expression. Surprisingly, this trend did not continue with the literature-only teachers, where there is a more even distribution among the three major categories. Our interpretation of why the students in literature-only classrooms had a more even distribution may be related to their receiving less explicit instruction about story elements such as character, setting, and plot than students in basal or basal-enhanced classrooms.

When we combined the less- and well-developed categories, the results were more marked between teachers who focused on skills and those who had some literature in their classrooms. Here we saw that the basal, basal-plus-literature, and literature-only teachers had a larger percentage of narratives (77%, 76% and 70% respectively) than the skills-based and basal-plus-skills teachers (45% and 55%, respectively). We found the skills-only

Table 5. Percentages of Oral Narrative Classifications Within the Teachers' Instructional Practice Categories

Teacher's instructional practice categories	Oral Narrative Classifications			
	Event-script <i>n</i> (%)	Less developed <i>n</i> (%)	Well developed <i>n</i> (%)	Other <i>n</i> (%)
Predominantly skills-based instruction 1 teacher (<i>n</i> = 11 narratives)	6 (54%)	5 (45%)	0	0
Pat ^a	6	5	0	0
Basal + skills-based instruction ^b 6 teachers (<i>n</i> = 59 narratives)	23 (39%)	18 (31%)	14 (24%)	4 (7%)
Marilyn ^a	4	4	2	
Danielle	5	4	1	
Nona	5	3	3	1
Penny ^a	1	4	4	2
Diane	5	3	2	1
Mary	3	0	2	0
Basal-based instruction ^b 2 teachers (<i>n</i> = 22 narratives)	4 (18%)	9 (41%)	8 (36%)	1 (6%)
Reneé	3	2	4	1
Sarah	1	7	4	0
Basal + literature-based instruction 4 teachers (<i>n</i> = 38 narratives)	8 (21%)	15 (39%)	14 (37%)	1 (3%)
Sharon ^a	5	3	3	0
June ^a	1	5	3	1
Joy	1	5	5	0
Candace	1	2	3	0
Literature-based instruction ^b 3 teachers (<i>n</i> = 36 narratives)	10 (28%)	14 (39%)	11 (31%)	1 (3%)
Pam	6	4	2	0
Connie ^a	1	7	4	0
Marge	3	3	5	1
Total (<i>N</i> = 166 narratives)	51 (31%)	61 (37%)	47 (28%)	7 (4%)

^aIndicates teachers featured in this report.

^bThese percentages total 101% due to rounding each of the four narrative category percentages within this instructional practice category.

and basal-plus-skills teachers had a larger percentage of event-scripts (54% and 39%) compared to 18%, 21%, and 28% for the other teachers.

Teacher Practices

The students' oral narratives reflected their relative exposure to texts in classrooms. In Table 6, we show the relationship between the six case-study

Table 6. Student Cases/Teacher Practices

Teacher	Event script	Less developed	Well developed	Other
Predominantly skills-based instruction				
Pat	Caterino			
Basal + skills-based instruction				
Penny	LaShaska			
Marilyn		Carlos		
Basal-based instruction				
Basal + literature-based instruction				
Sharon			Amanda	
June				Heather
Literature-based instruction				
Connie			Monica	

students and the practices of the six relevant teachers. Caterino and LaShaska produced event-scripts. Caterino’s was quite simple, whereas LaShaska’s was more elaborate; Caterino was in a skills-only classroom and LaShaska was in a classroom that emphasized skills but provided opportunities to read connected text. Carlos had a less-developed narrative and was in a classroom that emphasized both skills and the basal. The two girls who produced well-developed narratives were in classrooms that emphasized literature. Heather’s “other” narrative was an elaborate retelling reflecting the opportunities she had in her basal enhanced by literature classroom.

The six cases presented in the next section describe the relationship between the teacher’s practices and the narrative produced by an individual student.

Cases

In Table 7, we provide the scores for the San Diego Quick Assessment word identification, the phonological awareness, and the passage reading tasks as background information for the case-study students. These tasks were the most relevant to literacy skills, demonstrated the most diversity in responses, and were easily quantified.

Below, we present cases that represent our four narrative categories. We begin with two examples of event-scripts, analyze a less-developed narrative, then discuss two well-developed narratives, and end with an example of an “other.”

Caterino

Caterino, a 7-year-old Latino boy from Mexico, lived with his mother and

father and had free-lunch status. The teacher reported that the father was employed but had no specific employment information. The teacher also reported that though she had never been to their home, based on the address she thought the neighborhood was “fairly nice.” Caterino reported that he liked to read, although he did not report reading any books at home or interacting with family members around text. He said that both his mother and father read books and newspapers. He read only stories from the basal reader in his first-grade ESL classroom. When asked about writing, Caterino reported he liked to write about pictures (a school task), but believed he was a poor writer.

His teacher, Pat, described Caterino as “strictly monolingual when he walked in this room.” She stated:

If he were in a bilingual class, he would be swiftly moving. This is an ESL class, strictly English. And being a bilingual student, he'd be average.... If he was in a bilingual class, he would, I would think, he would be above average. But in a regular ESL class, all English, all of it English, he would be an average student.

Pat characterized Caterino as a hard worker with his academic strength in

Table 7. Student Literacy Measures: Individual Scores for Case Study Students and Means and Standard Deviations for Years 1 and 2 Students

Literacy measures	Caterino	LaShaska	Carlos	Amanda	Monica	Heather	Years 1 & 2 (N = 166) Mean (SD)
San Diego Word	16	37	27	47	36	35	31.9 (11.6)
Phonological Task	33	53	51	55	51	47	47.5 (7.5)
Miscues							
Passage 1	—	1	5	0	2	3	6.9 (8.8)
Passage 2	—	5	—	0	8	8	10.6 (9.3)
Self-Corrections							
Passage 1	—	1	0	0	1	1	1.2 (1.1)
Passage 2	—	0	—	0	2	1	1.5 (1.6)
Time (seconds)							
Passage 1	—	42	n/a	28	48	61	92.7 (68.1)
Passage 2	—	105	—	51	104	160	150.2 (89.8)
Fluency							
Passage 1	—	4	4	5	4	4	3.3 (1.2)
Passage 2	—	2	—	5	3	3	3.3 (1.2)
Comprehension							
Passage 1	—	3	3	3	3	3	2.4 (0.7)
Passage 2	—	3	—	3	2	2	2.6 (1.9)

Note. A dash indicates a non-attempt at reading the passage

mathematics, except for word problems, which required reading English, and his academic weakness as his common vocabulary and reading. Pat reported that Caterino was in the middle reading group and was progressing slowly because of the vocabulary demands of the stories:

[The basal reader includes skills such as] context clues where they fill in the blanks. And he'll have to know what the word, the meaning of the word. His common vocabulary is not very developed. He has to know the meaning of the word in order to accurately put it in a sentence.

Caterino's scores on word identification tasks (16) and spelling (33) were well below the means of 31.9 and 47.5, respectively, and he did not attempt to complete the passage readings (see Table 7).

Narrative. Caterino's oral narrative, classified as an event-script, was a basic description of selected components in the picture-prompt itself:

The boy waves his hand. The man waves his hand, too. The bird flies like this. The sky is blue.

In his text, Caterino simply described the picture-prompt but with no reference to the airplane. He seemed to order his descriptive sentences from more prominent to least prominent features. The sentence structure was simple with no dependent clauses related to the subject of each sentence. Caterino used present verb tenses in his narrative. Although each sentence was grammatically conventional, his narrative did not reflect structural knowledge of stories or content.

Teacher practices. Caterino was a student in Pat's ESL classroom, which was located in District 3, a very large urban district serving primarily a low-income community. Pat, a certified Spanish bilingual teacher with 13 years of experience, was an African American woman who lived outside the community in which she taught. In the larger study, she was identified as a skills-only teacher. Her reading program consisted primarily of isolated phonics instruction with minimal reading of connected text. She provided whole group direct instruction on skills and relied on worksheets for practice on these skills. For example:

... if they don't know the sounds that the alphabet give, then how can they pronounce a word. First you go with learn[ing] to read and write the alphabet, then you go into the alphabet sounds.... We start with voice cards, how the students are actually supposed to form their mouths and lips to form letters.

She had three reading groups based on ability and each group was reading from a different book in the basal series. The reading groups met briefly

with Pat two or three times each week, but students individually read the assigned basal story each morning during Sustained Silent Reading.

Pat believed that students were not ready to write their own texts until late spring, at which point she provided occasional opportunities for students to draw a picture connected to the basal story they were currently reading (on their own) and write three sentences that described the picture. Students copied boardwork (i.e., vocabulary words and sentences) daily. Students were expected to respond to teacher questions, and opportunities for students to tell stories or elaborate on ideas were rare. Most of the instruction was conducted in English with some occasional directions provided in Spanish.

Summary. Caterino produced a basic event-script narrative that seemed to reflect an ordered description of more prominent to less prominent features in the picture-prompt. However, he omitted reference to the airplane, an important feature. Nevertheless, his event-script narrative resembled his experiences with writing stories in his first-grade classroom – writing sentences that described a picture. His oral narrative seemed to be congruent with his English literacy skills, which were well below the mean. An important and complicating factor in Caterino's case was that Spanish was his first language, and he did not have the opportunity to tell his story in his dominant language.

What appeared significant about Caterino's case was that his classroom literacy experiences were not supportive of student-generated oral or written narratives in Spanish or English. Students completed worksheets and had few opportunities to read connected texts. When they did write, students were instructed to describe a picture and were not encouraged to embellish or elaborate on the prompt. Caterino's reported literacy experiences in the home were limited and seemed insufficient to compensate for his lack of experiences with narrative at school. The next case illustrates a more elaborated event-script told by a student in a classroom in which the teacher used the basal and emphasized skills in her instruction.

LaShaska

LaShaska, a 6½-year-old African American girl, was the youngest child of four children. She lived with her mother and older siblings and was on free lunch. Although her teacher reported that she was from a "single parent family" in which the mother was a student who did not work, LaShaska reported that "my mama and daddy ... read papers that school gives us and also they read books." LaShaska reported that she read at home on certain days of the week and had two favorite books from home, *If You Give a*

Mouse a Cookie and *Curious George*. She suggested that she and her mother and sister all liked to write, and that she was particularly fond of writing “make up stories” and songs.

Her teacher described LaShaska as “an average child in most senses of the word. In some ways she is slightly above average. She is in the top reading group. Handwriting is simply beautiful. She is stronger in math than in other subjects.” She found that she was “usually not a discipline problem, well-behaved. She likes attention – ‘Did I do it right’ – you know. She tries hard the majority of the time. If she does not understand, she just goes on.” In fact, LaShaska’s reading scores showed her to be well above the mean for the first graders we tested: 37 ($M = 31$) on word identification, 53 ($M = 47$) on phonological spelling task, and well above average on the passage reading tasks (see Table 7).

Narrative. Her oral narrative, classified as an event-script, was more elaborate than most event-scripts and contained some interesting features:

Why is he waving his hand? He might fall next time if he do that again. The boy in the green shirt is waving his hand at the man in the airplane. I like this picture. This picture had blue clouds and it is a pretty day. That’s all. And the airplane is pretty too. What is the boy standing on? Why do the airplanes have wheels if he is not on the concrete? Why did he buy the airplane with wheels if he knew that he didn’t want to ride on the concrete? Why do the boy have different color strings in his hair? See, he had different color strings.

When telling her story the second time, LaShaska seemed to use a conversational tone including such phrases as “That’s all” and “See, he had different color strings.” She may have been engaging in a more culturally based narrative, that is engaging the researcher in more of a dialogue when telling a story rather than telling a story to a more implied audience as is often the case with middle-class White students. However, she did not turn to the researcher when speaking or in any way indicate that her comments were not part of her story. When the researcher read the recorded text, LaShaska did not alter or augment her story. Therefore, we included her evaluative and conversational comments as part of the narrative.

In her text, LaShaska engaged in two acts – she described the objects and people, and she interrogated the picture. Her descriptions went beyond merely naming the objects to evaluating them (“it is a pretty day”) and making inferences through her questions. Her text was not a narrative, because there was little coherence and no sequence of events or character development. However, she implied a story by questioning the boy’s motivation (“Why did he buy the airplane with wheels if he knew that he didn’t want to ride on the concrete?”) In the picture there is no concrete;

only the boy's shoulders, head, and waving hand are shown.) LaShaska also pointed out what she saw as illogical ("Why do the airplane have wheels if he is not on the concrete?"), presumably asking why the airplane, which is in the air, needs wheels at that moment.

Teacher practices. LaShaska was a student in Penny's classroom, which was located in District 3, a very large urban district serving primarily a low-income community. Penny, an 8-year veteran teacher, was an African American woman who lived near the community in which she taught. Her reading instruction could be described as traditional with the bulk of her instruction focused on the basal; in the larger, longitudinal study she was characterized as a basal-plus-skills teacher. She provided direct instruction on skills, relied on worksheets for practice on these skills, and occasionally read aloud picture books to students. She had three reading groups – high, medium, and low; each group read the same story in the basal. Instruction was tailored to the group by her relative emphasis on skills and comprehension. For instance, students in the high and medium groups read the story aloud together, unassisted by the teacher, whereas Penny read aloud with the low group. After reading aloud one or two pages, Penny asked students both literal comprehension and inference questions and occasionally asked students to make predictions about ideas in the text. She also emphasized "word analysis" by telling students to look closely at the words, to sound them out, or to note beginnings and endings of words. Correct pronunciation and comprehension were nearly equally emphasized. Although Penny engaged students in discussions about stories they read, students were "led" to the "right answers," and they were not encouraged to formulate their own interpretations of the text.

Penny believed that students were not ready to write their own texts until about January of first grade, at which point she provided occasional opportunities for students to write on assigned topics such as "Winter Fun." Opportunities for students to tell stories or elaborate on ideas were rare. There was no formal "sharing time," and often when students initiated elaboration of the texts they read, she said, "I did not ask for your stories now, I asked you for..." When she was looking for an answer to a question, she did not encourage students to talk.

Summary. LaShaska produced an event-script; yet her text was a more elaborated one than other students because it contained many details, inferences, and questions. Her production of an event-script was not necessarily predictive of her achievement with literacy, because she did score above average on most of the tasks. She did have opportunities to read connected texts in her classroom, yet phonetic skills and literal comprehension were emphasized rather than story elements. Her classroom was not supportive of student-generated oral or written narratives and this

may account for her not producing a well-developed sequential story while, at the same time, she was able to identify words and comprehend well. Exposure to literature at home as evidenced in her ability to provide examples of books she read there may have provided her with some exposure to narrative, aiding her in providing details and questions.

The two cases described above illustrate the range of event-scripts in our sample. Both focused on descriptions of the picture; LaShaska's was more elaborate in her use of details and questions than Caterino's. The next case is an example of a narrative, albeit less-developed, because it contains some elements of conventional narrative structure.

Carlos

Carlos was a 6½-year-old Latino boy who attended school in an urban district (District 1). He reported reading *The Balloon* and *Come Out, Chip* at home and at school and liked it when his teacher allowed him to take books home to read. He believed he was the best reader in the class, because "when I first started first grade I knew every word and I was on the hard books." Carlos reported that his parents and his brother were good readers and read school books that the teacher gave them. He liked to write when he could "make pictures with them" but did not feel he was a good writer because "I don't know every word," implying that good writing was more about correct spelling than story composition.

Carlos' teacher, Marilyn, had limited knowledge of his background, but believed he was not on reduced lunch and lived with both parents who worked. Marilyn believed that his mother helped Carlos and supported her efforts as a teacher.

Carlos basically seems like a very immature little boy ... he's small, very immature in his writing, reading, everything. But boy if I tell mother he needs to pass those words, by golly, he passes those words. If he brings home a "U" on his spelling test, she's up here wanting that list of words and he passes the test. I believe it is pure grit. She just does it for him. So obviously, he must have something or she couldn't do it. It wouldn't matter how much she cared. He must have something. But she's one of those parents that you get and you need them.

Marilyn found that Carlos was a "weak average," below the middle of the class. She described him as strong on memorization, but weak on writing sentences and comprehension. Carlos' reading scores suggested that he was about an average reader with a San Diego test of 27, below the mean of 31; a spelling test of 51, above the mean of 47; and an average reading of the passage, containing 5 miscues, fewer than the mean of 7 (see Table 7).

Narrative. Carlos' narrative was categorized as a less-developed narrative, because it contained a clear beginning and some plot development:

The boy said hi to the plane. And the man went on and the boy stop saying hi. And he went back home. And the plane went wherever he was.

Told in the past tense, the narrative contained a clear sequence of events. Carlos also incorporated the main features of the picture – the boy waving and the plane. However, there was little elaboration of plot and little character development; the story also lacked coherence and did not have a clear ending. The story suggests that Carlos had an idea of what constituted a narrative and may have been familiar with traditional story elements such as plot and character. What influence might his classroom have had on him?

Teacher practices. Carlos' teacher, Marilyn, combined a developmental view towards students, suggesting that students who struggled did so because of their young age with a static view of students' ability – bright students will learn anyway, whereas less capable will struggle with any program. A European American woman with 14 years of teaching experience, she was knowledgeable about changing trends in the field of literacy, but believed strongly in vocabulary control.

Working in an ethnically and economically diverse urban district, Marilyn's instruction emphasized skills, but she also provided opportunities for students to read connected texts in the basal. In the larger study, she was characterized as a basal-plus-skills teacher. She generally read aloud a story from the basal textbook, asked students comprehension questions that focused on main character and events, and then had students read the book chorally, and finally read in partners. She used puppets to make vocabulary drills more interesting. Student writing occurred within the context of vocabulary development – students spread around the room, wrote sentences using vocabulary words from the story, and read them into a tape recorder. Finally, all student sentences were shared with the whole class.

Marilyn read aloud children's stories to support thematic units (e.g., *The Three Little Pigs* for her "pig unit"). Students were then engaged in a discussion about how that book differed from others in the unit. Cooperative grouping was occasionally used, although Marilyn was not certain of its value. Additionally, she taught phonics by introducing a letter a day and wanted to develop fluent readers by timing students on pronunciation of new vocabulary words and a page from the story.

Summary. Carlos' narrative reflected an understanding of story elements. Although it contained a beginning and a sequence of events, it was neither elaborate nor well-developed. His telling of an oral narrative seemed quite comparable to his literacy skills, which were both about average. Carlos indicated he had opportunities at home and at school to read narratives.

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He seemed comfortable naming books he read in both places and saw parents and a sibling reading. His classroom also offered opportunities for developing a sense of narrative. Though his teacher included many skills in her instruction, she also read aloud to students and regularly involved them in reading connected text. Few opportunities for students to develop their own stories were evident, however; students did not compose oral stories nor did they compose their own written narratives. Writing was confined to students' construction of a single sentence. Carlos did have an understanding of traditional narrative that might have been extended had he had more opportunities to compose his own stories in school settings.

Like Carlos, the next case-study student, Amanda, reported having opportunities at home and school to interact with text. Yet, she had many more opportunities to construct her own texts within the classroom setting.

Amanda

Amanda, a European American girl, was 6 years and 11 months, the older of two girls with a third child due within 2 months. She lived with her mother and father in a new single-family home and was on regular lunch. Her teacher reported that Amanda's mother was a first-grade teacher on campus and her father was an architect whose work was related to an architectural magazine that he wrote, edited, and managed. Amanda reported that she read at home anytime she got a chance, primarily after school and before bed, and that her dad read every evening, especially enjoying "ghost stories." She reported having a lot of books at home and enjoying all types. Her favorites at home were fairy tales, whereas at school her favorite books were animal books.

Her teacher, Sharon, described Amanda as coming to first grade:

... already reading just almost anything she wanted to read and has been able to read since she was about 2 or 3.... They read to her now, but she began to read to herself when she was about 3. I did a quick informal inventory with her at the beginning of first grade and her word recognition skills were about the middle of third grade and her comprehension was about second grade. So I've spent most of this year trying to teach her the kinds of skills that would let her gain more information from materials since I knew that just by osmosis she knows how to figure out words, anything you give, anything.

Sharon stated that Amanda was quiet and somewhat shy, so Sharon had also "worked ... more on social skills. I'm really pleased to see her in a group and how much she interacts now. When she has something to say, she really pushes forward so she can get her opinion expressed."

Amanda had a good self-image stating that she and another girl, Hannah, were the best readers in the class. This was supported by her excellent scores on the reading measures: 47 on word identification ($M = 31$), 55 on spelling ($M = 47$), and very fast, fluent readings with excellent comprehension on the passage readings (see Table 7). She also claimed to enjoy writing and was writing a story (currently six-pages long). She stated that she liked to write stories that were interesting to read and that she got ideas for her own pieces from other stories she read.

Narrative. Amanda's oral narrative, classified as a well-developed narrative, was more elaborate than other well-developed narratives and contained several interesting features.

A Boy Who Wanted to Fly an Airplane

One day a little boy's father told him that he was going to check the earth to see how it was doing. On the day he left, he said he would be back in probably 6 months. When his father came home, he told the little boy that the earth was doing fine. Then the little boy asked, "Is it hard to fly an airplane?" His father said, "No, not really." His father asked the little boy if he would like to fly an airplane some day. The little boy said, "Yes." His father said, "Would you like to see this surprise?" The little boy likes airplanes so he said, "Yes." And his father showed him the airplane. The little boy was amazed because he saw the same airplane up in the sky. He told his father what he had seen. His father said, "That's funny because I saw you on the ground when I was checking our house to see if it had any problems."

Amanda's narrative reflected coherence, a sequence of events, and character development. Her opening few sentences established the context for the picture prompt – a man flying an airplane with a young boy waving to the man. Then, through dialogue, Amanda presented and developed the boy's and the father's characters and their interpersonal relationship. Finally, Amanda reconnected her narrative to the picture prompt by having the characters report a past specific experience of seeing one another. The structure of the narrative reflected a clear beginning, middle, and end. It included a problem – the boy's interest in airplanes and his noticing an unusual airplane – and a resolution to the problem – the boy's discovery that the unusual airplane was, in fact, his father's and that he had seen the airplane in flight piloted by a man who he now knows was his father. The sentences were varied and reflected complex structures, including multiple clauses. Additionally, Amanda's sentences were grammatically conventional with appropriate subject-verb agreement and verb tense usage.

Teacher practices. Amanda was a student in Sharon's classroom that was located in District 2, a rural district serving primarily a low-average to average income community. Sharon, a 12-year veteran teacher, was a European

American woman who lived in the community in which she taught. Her reading instruction could be described as progressive with instruction focused both on the basal and on tradebooks. She was characterized as a basal-plus-literature teacher in the larger, longitudinal study. She provided whole-class direct instruction on skills that were not necessarily tied to specific stories or books. She managed multiple reading groups each of which were on different stories or in different books. Sharon described her reading program as an "individualized one" where "The children move through the series of texts and through the skills on an individual basis. So each child receives instruction at the level in which they are operating and in which they feel successful." Individuals or small ability groups of children read aloud daily as Sharon monitored, supplying individual support with words as required. She noted problem words and skills on a clipboard that was used to plan subsequent instruction and opportunities for practice. Sharon interacted with the students informally, asking them questions about the story and focusing on how it related to them. Additionally, she provided students opportunities to extend their understanding of the story through talk, writing, and projects.

Sharon believed that students were ready to write their own texts at the beginning of school. She accepted and celebrated emergent forms of writing and worked to help students become more conventional in their written expressions. Writing opportunities in the class included journals, worksheets, stories, reports, letters, and messages.

Summary. Amanda produced an elaborate, complex narrative with cohesion, dialogue, and problem resolution. Her oral narrative was a good indicator of her excellent literacy skills in the first grade. Her report about her home experiences suggested her parents were particularly supportive of literacy learning. Her classroom also provided some opportunities for child generation of oral and written narratives. The combination of these experiences may account for the conventional and sophisticated use of narrative structure. Her interest in and many years of reading widely may also have contributed to her narrative style.

Whereas Amanda came from a middle-class background, the next case, Monica, came from a low-income background. Both girls reported interacting with text at home, and in both cases, the teachers provided literature-rich classroom environments.

Monica

Monica was a 6½-year-old Latina from a low-income family who participated in the free breakfast and lunch program. She reported that she liked to read "about Mickey Mouse, Cinderella, and fairy tales" when friends

came over and “when it rains and the TV doesn’t work.” She seemed to have several favorite books both at home and at school and cited Dr. Seuss books as those among her favorites. Monica identified both her parents as readers, with her mom liking magazines about “food and stuff” and her dad reading comic books, “He has 1,000 of them.” Monica saw reading and writing as connected and remarked that she liked to write “so I can learn how to read more” and found her mother helpful when she got stuck with her homework.

Her teacher described her as, “a very loving child, very sensitive, always tries her best.” The teacher believed that there was very little money in the home but that Monica had a solid background coming in, “I really believe that it was *her* work that got her there. She wants to succeed.” The teacher described her as a “very literary child” who enjoyed reading. Monica was quite successful on school tasks scoring above average with 36 ($M = 31$) on word identification, above average on the spelling test with 51 ($M = 47$), and well above average on the passage readings, suggesting she was a fast and fluent reader (see Table 7).

Narrative. Monica’s well-developed narrative reflected a deep knowledge of text structure, including an introduction, a problem to be solved, and an ending. She included dialogue and a sophisticated punch line:

A little boy saw a plane and it was red. He wished he could draw one. So he imagined that he could draw it because he was an artist. Time went by and he got old. So he bought a magic cat and he told the cat if he could have a plane like the one he saw. So the cat made his wish and he got on the plane and went up and up and up and he brought the cat with him in case he needed him. There came a thunderstorm and one of the thunder hit one of the arms of the plane. And he said to the cat if he can stop the thunder, but the cat said, “I can bring stuff to people, not make stuff go away.” So the plane went down and down and it crashed.

Monica’s story seemed to reflect familiarity with fairy tale elements such as magic cats, yet it had a realistic flair – the character got older and the plane crashed when the cat would not stop the thunder. She was quick to describe her character from the beginning, allowing him to develop over time. Her use of dialogue brought the story to a climax and explored the inner motives of the other character, the cat. She began with the plane, the most salient feature of the prompt, and continued to weave it throughout the story; it was tied to the problem and to its resolution. Although her grammar was not completely conventional, it was complex and seemingly advanced for first graders in our study. Monica’s ability to tell a sophisticated story under the time constraints and the task suggested that she had many opportunities to construct oral and written texts in a variety of settings.

Teacher practices. Monica was a student in Connie's first-grade classroom. A European American woman, Connie had taught first grade for 5 years in District 1, an urban district with a diverse population. She was an enthusiast for whole language curricula and was identified as a literature-only teacher in the larger, longitudinal study. She believed in the integration of reading and writing, and in the teaching of "skills" such as mechanics, spelling, and phonics in the immediate context of a reading or writing situation. She had used workbook pages in the past but found little transfer to authentic literacy situations. In her mind, all texts were possible sources of reading material for her class, depending on how they were used and the quality of the language. She pulled text from wherever she could – basals, the new readers, and literature. She used "Mortimer Frog," because she felt the language was not controlled or basalized, and kids could relate to bringing a book to class (as in the story). She never grouped students by ability and wanted her students to be "comfortable" with books and not to feel intimidated by them.

The students also kept journals, rewrote rhyming texts, and were involved in response to literature. The teacher developed units around topics (mice, rain, etc.), read aloud to students, and had activities related to the books. Throughout these activities, there was a rich dialogue in which the students contributed ideas and Connie elaborated on them or provided information.

Summary. Monica had many opportunities to construct her own written texts and to engage in dialogue with the teacher and other students at school. Her oral narrative was a good predictor of her literacy skills. She reported reading at home and having an environment that was supportive of literacy practices. These home and school opportunities to construct texts seemed to be reflected in Monica's oral narrative, which expressed features of a well-developed narrative including plot, character, and dialogue. Monica was a case that challenged the traditional view that low-income families do not provide literacy opportunities, and supported Teale's (1986) findings that rich literacy experiences are embedded within the fabric of most communities. The teacher seemed to build on her home experiences in providing multiple opportunities to engage with connected text.

Most of the students described above responded to the task in expected ways – they included features of the pictures in their narrative attempts. Our last case, Heather, responded to the task in a surprising way that was quite sophisticated and seemed to suit her purpose.

Heather

Heather, a 6-year-old European American girl, lived with both parents and

two sisters in a single-family home and was on regular lunch. Heather reported that she read chapter books at home in the afternoons and at night. Her favorite books included *Little Sisters*, which she had at home, and *The Runaway Bunny* and *The Hippopotamus Ate the Teacher* at school. To Heather, the ability to read quickly and to read above-grade-level chapter books were indicators of "good" reading, indicators that her sister demonstrated. Heather claimed to enjoy writing, because it made her read better, "When I write and I want to read it, it just makes me read better." She also claimed to be a good writer, because she wrote long stories.

Heather's teacher, June, had much information about many families in her classroom and was especially knowledgeable about Heather's family because she had taught her older sister. June described Heather as capable, not as "bright as her older sister," yet she still qualified for the gifted and talented program. She was a good writer and was a member of the "stronger" of the two reading groups. She entered first grade already reading. Her performance on reading tasks was about average: 35 ($M = 32$) on word identification, 47 ($M = 47$) on spelling, and above average on the passage reading scores (see Table 7).

Narrative. Heather's oral narrative, classified as "other" was an elaborate retelling of a chapter book entitled *The Castle in the Attic* (Wintrop, 1985) that her teacher had been reading aloud to the class. In her initial telling, she said that the picture reminded her of a book they were reading and retold the story. In her second rendition, she retold the story without preamble:

The Castle in the Attic

There was this boy named William and he didn't want his mom to go. So he shrunk her with this little coin that he could shrink her. Then she got all mad at him and she wouldn't talk to him until he got her big again. But the silver knight thought there was this horse and so he got lost because there wasn't a horse really. So he found this castle that had this king, but the king was mean and so William, he could do gymnastics so he did a front flip on him and took this necklace that could put him in lead. So he put him in the lead and then he got the coin to make his mom get bigger.

Heather's narrative began with the title of the book followed by a summary of the book's plot. Her first sentence identified the main character, William, and identified the overarching problem facing the main character – dealing with his long-time nanny (which Heather characterized as William's mom) leaving him to return to her homeland, Great Britain. The next two sentences reported William's initial efforts to deal with this overarching problem which gives rise to subsequent subproblems. Heather then proceeded to identify several subproblems and resolutions in sequential

order as represented in the last portion of the book. Her final sentence addressed the resolution of the overarching problem – performing the magic to return the nanny (mom) to normal life size which allows her to leave William and return to Great Britain. The structure of this narrative retelling of a chapter book not only reflected a clear beginning, middle, and end, but also closely reflected the content of a particular book with the same title as her story. The sentences were varied and reflected the ordered passage of time, “There was ... So he ... Then she ... But the ... So he ... but the ... So he.” Additionally, her sentences were grammatically conventional with appropriate subject-verb agreement and verb tense usage.

Teacher practices. Heather was a student in June’s classroom, located in District 4, a large suburban district that serves a community in transition. June, a 25-year veteran teacher, was a European American woman who had taught in England as well as various districts around the state. She had 19 years of experience teaching first grade, the last 3 years at the school included in this study. She was categorized as a basal-plus-literature teacher in the larger, longitudinal study. June held strong convictions concerning the importance of students learning to “love reading,” and teaching reading and writing. “If any child can think, they can all read. Reading and writing go hand in hand. If they can read, they can do anything.” Her reading instruction revolved around literature, but she also used the basal readers and worksheets for skill practice. At the beginning of the year, June administered informal testing to determine basic word knowledge and to place students into one of two reading groups.

An advocate of the Language to Literacy program (a program promoting student response to literature and connections of books to students’ lives and other books, see Roser & Hoffman, 1992) and the Great Books program, June implemented those programs in addition to a more traditional basal approach to reading. She shared her extensive personal library and personal travel stories with the children several times each day. She made her own flash cards for words she thought they needed and distributed independent practice skill worksheets for seatwork during reading group time. The two reading groups, differentiated by the stories they were reading, included choral reading followed by silent reading. June practiced repeated reading of stories (oral and silent) so children would have several opportunities to see print. June believed that students were ready to write their own texts and responses to literature at the beginning of school. She provided multiple reading/writing connections and writing opportunities each day.

Summary. Heather’s narrative, classified as “other,” was an elaborate retelling of a chapter book that had been read aloud in the class. Her narrative

retelling had a clear beginning, middle, and end, featuring the overarching problem of the main character with several subproblems and final resolution. In terms of structure, her narrative reflected many elements of a well-developed narrative; however, because her story had little to do with the picture prompt, we categorized it as an “other.” Heather’s narrative reflects her classroom literacy experiences that were highly supportive of student retellings of literature and the generation of oral and written texts.

Discussion

By categorizing students’ oral narratives and examining the practices of teachers with a variety of types of instruction, our study suggests a link between opportunities for producing narratives in classroom settings and the quality of students’ narratives. We found that students in classrooms with predominantly skills-based instruction produced more narratives that were event-scripts and less-developed narratives. In contrast, students in classrooms with basal instruction or basal instruction enhanced by literature produced fewer event-scripts and increasingly more developed narratives. We account for this relationship by suggesting that students in skills-based classrooms had fewer opportunities to engage with connected texts, whereas students in basal and literature-enhanced classrooms had more opportunities to read and write connected texts. Our findings suggest that certain classroom practices, which either support or narrow opportunities for engagement with oral and written text, can be an important influence in supporting students’ construction of oral narratives. Our findings support previous research that has demonstrated the link between instruction and student learning (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Hoffman, 1991). Yet, our study has an important twist that raises questions for further study: Assuming that students in literature-only classrooms would be exposed to an even greater amount of literature and opportunities for writing than students in other classrooms, why did students in those classrooms not show a larger number of well-developed narratives than students in other classrooms? We suggest the possibility that teachers in the literature-only classrooms may not have attended to features such as plot, setting, and character in an explicit manner, but hoped that students might implicitly understand those features simply through exposure to text (see McCarthey, 1997). Our findings indicate the need for further explorations to understand more clearly the relationships between explicit discussion about story elements and the stories that children produce both orally and in written form.

Various sources of data such as interviews with teachers and students, classroom observation, oral narratives, and literacy measures allowed us

to examine the influence of classroom instruction and materials on students' construction of oral narratives. Although we find it compelling that teachers' practices seemed to influence students' narratives, we also acknowledge that a variety of factors may have affected students' productions of texts. Factors such as opportunities for telling stories at home; differences in cultural, social and linguistic backgrounds; and the actual setting of the task may influence narrative construction. The individual cases provided examples of ways in which students' narrative constructions were embedded in a variety of contextual features. Using multiple sources of data highlighted cases in which there seemed to be a convergence among teachers' attitudes and information about the students, students' reports of home experiences, their production of oral narratives, and other measures of reading performance (e.g., the cases of Amanda, Carlos, and Monica). The use of various data sources also pointed to a lack of convergence in characterizing some students and their abilities (e.g., the case of LaShaska). *This finding highlights the importance of understanding students in their multiple contexts when assessing their knowledge of narrative and factors that influence it.* Because our study was part of a larger, longitudinal study focused on classroom practices, we did not visit the homes of individual students. However, we see the tremendous value of interviewing family members and making home visits to learn about students' opportunities for learning about narratives within more specific cultural contexts.

We found that the six case-study students' oral narratives were quite good predictors of their achievement in literacy in the first grade, especially at the ends of the continuum. For example, Caterino, who scored below the mean on literacy measures produced an event-script, whereas Monica and Amanda, who both scored well above average, produced well-developed narratives. This finding connected well with Paul and Smith's (1993) work that showed a link between narrative skills and preparation for literacy. However, there was not a perfect match between the quality of narratives and literacy achievement on other measures. As Morrow (1985) and Sulzby (1985) have pointed out, the transition between oral and written language is complex. Therefore, oral narratives may be an important guidepost for the move from oral language to literacy, but they can not take the place of measures such as word identification and comprehension that are more specific to reading. Further, students need many more opportunities to participate in storytelling events for narratives to become good predictors of later literacy achievement. McCabe (1996) made many excellent suggestions about how teachers might understand the multiplicity of texts that students produce and provided ideas for implementing storytelling sessions in classrooms.

We found that the categories of *event-script*, *less-developed*, *well-developed*, and *other* seemed to be a useful way to categorize students' narratives. For the most part, students' narratives were readily categorized, supporting other research that has defined these features (see Hudson & Shapiro, 1991). However, we became quite aware of the limitations of this analytical framework as we looked carefully at particular students' narratives and as we became more familiar with the literature on social and cultural differences in narrative styles. For example, LaShaska's narrative posed some challenges. Her text was not a narrative in a traditional sense because there was little coherence and no sequence of events or character development, so we categorized it as an event-script. However, there were many interesting features of her text such as interrogating the picture, evaluating the objects, and making inferences. Her text might be more characteristic of thematic, topic-associative styles of telling stories often found in African American children, especially the African American girls (Michaels, 1981). Although McCabe's (1996) work provided some guidance in looking for features that might be characteristic of particular cultures, we also wanted to avoid being overly deterministic in attributing trends within cultural traditions to individuals. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of systematic frames that take into consideration cultural differences and more need to be developed.

Earlier research has suggested that both task and topic play a role in facilitating students' narratives (Hudson & Shapiro, 1991). The artificiality of the rhetorical situation in our study may have limited students' constructions; students who produced event-scripts may have been able to tell complex stories, but did not demonstrate that ability in this situation. For example, Caterino, who had limited English, may have told a much longer and complex story in Spanish. The picture, which we thought was "neutral" because of its vagueness, may have been culturally bound, possibly making it difficult for African American or Latino students to relate to it. The old-fashioned, bi-wing airplane with propellers may have been alien to the experience of some students. Students are more likely to respond when they have background information about the topic (Anderson & Pearson, 1984) or when they can see themselves and their cultures represented in texts and illustrations (Harris, 1993; Sims, 1982).

We recommend that future studies in oral narratives build into the design more prompts that relate to students' backgrounds and afford opportunities for students to tell stories within more natural settings. Further research can increase our understanding of influences on students' narratives by examining home and school literacy practices and allowing more student control in enacting the task.

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