



Session 12

The act of telling a story is always important to the developing child, because in the telling the child is both practicing telling stories and building up an inventory of stories that contribute to a life story and a self-representation.

-The Stories Children Tell (S. Engel, 1995)

Teaching Narrative Using the Reasoning Strategy

Learning Objectives

- ◇ **Review** the term low-support strategy, and **define** the term reasoning strategy.
- ◇ **Demonstrate** use of the reasoning strategy when teaching narrative skills.
- ◇ **Analyze** children's responses to the reasoning strategy in a narrative activity.
- ◇ **Reflect** on how the reasoning strategy can be used in your classroom to improve children's narrative ability.
- ◇ **Describe** how the reasoning strategy can be extended to all four *Read It Again–PreK!* domains.

Overview

Narrative is one of the most important areas of literacy development for young children. In prior sessions we discussed several important points about the narrative skills of young children. It may be helpful to review some of that content.

In Session 1, for instance, we pointed out that to produce a narrative, a child must:

Use good pitch, loudness, and pauses:

- Does the child vary her rhythm? Is the child not too loud but not too soft? Does the child use pauses at the right time, so that the narrative is not too fast but not too slow?

Select the right words to convey information accurately and precisely:

- Does the child make good word choices to be precise and clear? Does the child use specific nouns to refer to items rather than general words (e.g., “the boy” instead of “he”)? Does the child use specific verbs to refer to events or actions rather than general words (e.g., “flew” instead of “go”)?

Organize words and phrases into sentences and link these sentences together:

- Does the child organize words into phrases rather than simply using single words to convey ideas (e.g., “the little dog” instead of “dog”)? Does the child string together many sentences to make a complete story? Does the child link sentences together using conjunctions, like “and,” “but” and “so”? Does the story exhibit cohesion, in that it flows along and can be understood as a unit?

Be creative so as to produce something interesting:

- Does the child include interesting details, such as information about setting and characters, when telling fictional stories? Does the child provide information about feelings and emotions when sharing personal events?



These skills do not come easily to all children! In fact, in session 11, we discussed a high-support strategy (the eliciting strategy) to support children who are having difficulty with narrative tasks. Some children, however, have an easier time acquiring the skills necessary to produce strong narratives. When teachers ask these children questions about narratives (e.g., *Where did the story take place? Who were the characters?*), they simply are not challenged. For these children, low-support strategies help them to engage in narrative tasks, such as those featured in *Read It Again—PreK!*

In this session, we focus our attention on how to support children who are having an easy time with activities targeting narrative skills.

The Reasoning Strategy

The low-support strategy we describe in this session is **reasoning**.

The reasoning strategy asks children to explain why something happened or will happen, or to explain why something is the way it is.

As with other low-support strategies, the reasoning strategy puts a heavier cognitive load on the child than simply producing the answer to a question. Not only must the child know a specific answer, but he or she is also asked to conduct an analysis of that answer. Let’s look at an example:

Teacher: When we want to tell someone what happened during our day at the beach, do we start by telling them when we drove home from the beach?

Child: No!

Teacher: Tell me why we wouldn’t want to start by telling them that we drove home from the beach.

Child: Then we wouldn't tell them what we did when we were there.

Teacher: You are exactly right. To tell a good, interesting story, we need to start at the beginning. Then our story makes sense. Telling about driving home would come at the end of our story.

In this example, the teacher is targeting the narrative concept that stories have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Rather than simply asking the child to state that a story starts at the beginning of an experience or event, the teacher is requiring the child to think about (a) what the listener would need to know, (b) what constitutes a good beach story (the fact that they were at the beach for the day, rather than just going home from it), and (c) that there is a logical order to narratives. Note how the teacher rephrases the child's response to reinforce the logical progression of a strong narrative.

Let's look at another example:

Teacher: Look at all these animals on the page. They look like they are having fun. Who can tell me where they live?

Children: In a forest!

Teacher: It is a kind of forest, but what kind of forest?

Children: A jungle!

Teacher: Yes, it is a jungle! How did you know that?

Children: The monkey is on the vines and it has those trees on the page.

Teacher: Yep, there are palm trees, and we know palm trees are in the jungle, along with the vines and the monkeys. The jungle is the setting for our story.

In this example, the teacher first asks a fairly straightforward question concerning the setting of a story: "Who can tell me where they live?" The teacher appears to be probing the students' knowledge about setting by having them first talk about where the animals live, but she then challenges them further by asking how they know the answer. This is a perfect application of the reasoning strategy, as the children are required to explain why something is the way it is. It is not enough when using the low-support strategy of reasoning to have the children provide the answer "jungle." Asking them to explain their answer extends this narrative activity into a reasoning exercise that will further the children's language and cognitive abilities.

Terms and Background Knowledge

Vocabulary

Narrative – An account of an experience or event that unfolds over time. There are three major types: personal narrative, fictional narrative, and event cast.

Low-support strategy – A strategy that is required for tasks that are too easy for the child and that he or she is close to being able to do on his or her own.

Reasoning strategy – A low-support instructional strategy that requires children to explain why something happened or will happen, or to explain why something is the way it is.



Activity 1. Teacher Implementation of the Reasoning Strategy

As we think about using the reasoning strategy, let's consider how to support children's narrative skills by providing questions that encourage explanation. Remember, with the reasoning strategy, the teacher asks children to explain why something happened or will happen, or to explain why something is the way it is. Read this transcript of a classroom conversation.

Teacher: Our chameleon finds a friend at the end who changes color just like he does. What does the chameleon's friend do?

Child: He changes color with him!

Teacher: I think we should create a story about a chameleon, just like the one in our story. Do you think, though, that we should keep his color the same all the time, give him a color of his own, or have it change?

Child: Keep his color the same! Give him his own color.

Teacher: Why do you want to keep his color the same?

Child: Because he was sad when he changed colors.

Teacher: How do you know he was sad?*

Child: Because he kept looking for his own color.

Teacher: Okay, sounds like a good choice. Griffin will tell us a story about his chameleon whose color does not change. Start from the beginning, Griffin.

Activity 1. Teacher Implementation of the Reasoning Strategy

Now, answer these questions about the preceding exchange.

In this narrative activity, what *Read It Again–PreK!* objective is the teacher addressing?

The teacher used the reasoning strategy two times in the above excerpt. This is a low-support strategy typically used with children who have strong narrative skills in order to challenge them. What evidence suggests that these children have strong narrative skills and this strategy is appropriate?

Give a specific example of an instance when the teacher used the reasoning strategy.

Describe the child's response to the teacher's use of the reasoning strategy. Was the child able to successfully respond?

Look at the teacher's question above indicated by an asterisk*. Turn this question into an example of a high-support strategy and describe a likely child response.



Activity 2. Learners' Ladders

Review the strategy of reasoning addressed in four *Read It Again–PreK!* Learners' Ladder Narrative Lessons. These lessons are:

- Learners' Ladder Lesson 4
- Learners' Ladder Lesson 24
- Learners' Ladder Lesson 40
- Learners' Ladder Lesson 52

Of the examples provided in these lessons, which ones do you feel you use often in your daily instruction?

Next, review these two examples from Learners' Ladder Lesson 40.

Example 1:

Teacher: When we tell stories about something that happened to us, why do we need to start with a very clear beginning and middle, before we can get to the end?

Example 2:

Teacher: If I'm telling a story, should I start right in the middle? Why or why not, Joanna?

Reflect on the following:

These two examples represent reasoning, a low-support strategy. Reasoning should be used with children who might benefit from a challenge. Rewrite each of these examples so that they demonstrate the teacher's use of a high-support (rather than low-support) strategy.

Activity 2. Learners' Ladders

Listen and Learn



Activity 3.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 12, Activity 3** from the RIA DVD menu. You will see a teacher reading a book to a group of children. Complete the activity as described below.

Watch this teacher use the reasoning strategy to address narrative objectives while reading *The Biggest Snowman Ever* by Steven Kroll.

Now, answer these questions about the activity:

Which narrative objective was the teacher trying to target?

Describe the exact words the teacher used when applying the reasoning strategy.

Describe how the children responded to this strategy. Did the teacher's use of the reasoning strategy seem to encourage children's participation and success?

Now, listen to what we have to say.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 12, Activity 3 Discussion** from the RIA DVD menu.

Activity 3.



Activity 4.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 12, Activity 4** from the RIA DVD menu. You will see a teacher reading a book to a group of children. Complete the activity as described below.

Watch this teacher use the reasoning strategy to discuss narrative concepts with students while reading the book *Giggle, Giggle, Quack* by Doreen Cronin. After watching the video, look at your copy of the book and complete the following activities.

Choose another *Read It Again–PreK!* narrative objective to address with your students using this same book.

Write down the exact words you would use to implement the reasoning strategy when targeting this narrative objective.

Now, listen to what we have to say.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 12, Activity 4 Discussion** from the RIA DVD menu.

Activity 4.



Activity 5.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 12, Activity 5** from the RIA DVD menu. You will see a teacher reading a book to a group of children. Complete the activity as described below.

Watch this teacher use the reasoning strategy to discuss a different domain than that of narrative, namely vocabulary. She uses this strategy with students while reading the text *The Biggest Snowman Ever* by Steven Kroll. After you have finished watching, answer the following questions.

What is the teacher trying to teach the children?

Provide a few examples of the words the teacher used to employ the reasoning strategy.

How did the children respond to this strategy? Was it an appropriate strategy to use with these children? Why or why not?

Now, listen to what we have to say.

Turn on your DVD player and select **Session 12, Activity 5 Discussion** from the RIA DVD menu.

Activity 5.

Reflect and Apply

Reflect

1. Think about a child in your classroom who has an easy time with narrative activities. Write that child's name here:

_____.

How often do you currently use the reasoning strategy with this child when engaging in narrative tasks?

To what extent would this child benefit from more exposure to this strategy?

2. Look again at the reasoning strategy as discussed in the *Read It Again–PreK!* Learners' Ladders. Do you use this strategy often in your classroom? Why or why not?

What is one classroom activity during which you could introduce the reasoning strategy this week?

3. Read over this excerpt from the book *The Night Before Kindergarten* by Natasha Wing.

The parents were worried their children would cry if they left them at school with just a good-bye. So they told their darlings, “If you want, we can stay and make sure that everything will be A-okay.”

Next, answer these questions:

How could you use this excerpt to teach children how to identify the setting of a story? Give a specific example of what you might say or do to teach children about setting using this excerpt.

Are there children in your classroom who may have an easy time following what you say or do to teach this concept?

If there are children who may have an easy time following what you say or do to teach this concept, describe how you could use the strategy of reasoning to support their learning. Write the exact words you might use.

Apply

1. Find a storybook in your classroom library that has an interesting setting. Select a child in your classroom to read with and pause while reading to complete a narrative task that involves identifying the setting. Practice using the reasoning strategy. How did the child respond? Did you feel that your use of this strategy detracted from the storybook reading session?

2. Gather a small group of children in your classroom who have an easy time telling cohesive and clear stories. Guide the children through an activity designed to identify each of the major events in a story's time line. Ask the children to tell you what happened first, second, third, fourth, and so on. First, deliver the activity without providing the low-support strategy of reasoning. Note here the words you use to introduce and facilitate this activity:

Now, deliver the story event sequencing activity using the low-support strategy of reasoning. Note here the words you use to introduce and facilitate this activity:

3. Gather a small group of children in your classroom who have an easy time with the *Read It Again–PreK!* objectives in the domain of vocabulary. These should be children who have well-developed vocabularies and who have an easy time learning new words. Choose a storybook from your classroom library. As you read the book, ask the children to help you understand the meaning of some new words. Use the reasoning strategy to engage them and to support their learning. For instance, you might point out the word “notice” and ask the children what it might mean. Ask them to reason through their responses by listening for clues to word meanings that are contained in the text or by looking at the illustrations. Describe how children perform when you use this strategy:

Are there certain children who seem to have a difficult time with the reasoning strategy? If so, describe how you might modify the storybook reading session in order to provide opportunities for these children to participate more fully and to meet with success.



Resources

Brice-Heath, Shirley. 1983. *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. New York: McGraw-Hill; Oxford University Press.

Cronin, D. (2002). *Giggle, giggle, quack*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc.

Curenton, S. M., & Justice, L. M. (2004). African American and Caucasian preschoolers' use of decontextualized language: Literate language features in oral narratives. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 35, 240-253.

Deese, J. (1983). *Thought into speech: Psychology of a language*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Engel, S. (1995). *The stories children tell*. NY: W. H. Freeman and Company.

Kroll, S. (2005). *The biggest snowman ever*. New York, NY: Scholastic, Inc.

Wing, N. (2001). *The night before kindergarten*. New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap.

