



Global collaborations to achieve impact through speech pathology

The importance of sharing our stories

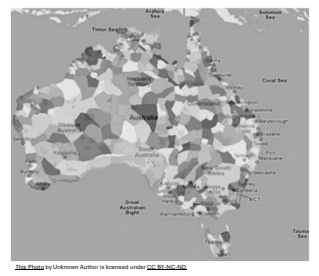
Prof. Marleen Westerveld, PhD, FSPA, CPSP

Speech Pathology Australia Conference, Gold Coast, QLD, Australia

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Acknowledgement

Dr Michelle Dewar:
"Storytelling is who we are... it is also what sustains us as First Nations peoples with unique and distinct identities and cultures."



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Why sharing our stories matter

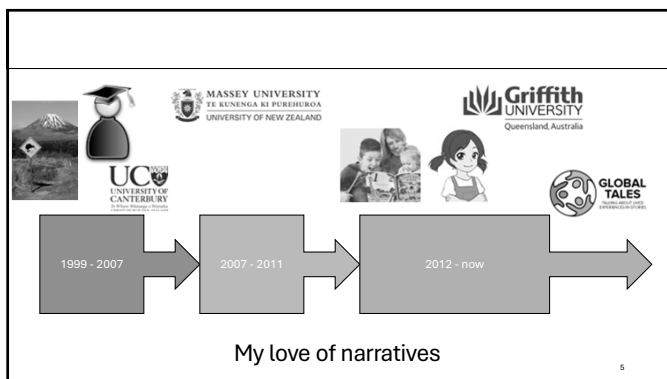
- Increasing cultural/linguistic diversity complicates distinguishing language difference vs disorder.
- Mis-identification leads to missed or inappropriate supports.
- Global collaboration and shared knowledge are key to developing culturally responsive, evidence-based tools.



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What are narratives?

- An oral narrative is a monologue describing an experience or events that are chronologically sequenced (Engel, 1995).
- Include: scripts, fictional narratives, personal narratives
- Personal narratives: A personally experienced past tense event



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Why *personal* narratives?

- Half of children's conversations are about personal events.
- Children draw on these personal experiences when reading / listening for meaning.
- Personal narratives feature in the Australian curriculum.
- Personal narratives are 'universal'



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Are personal and fictional narratives the same genre?

The answer is NO.

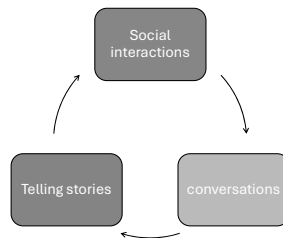
- Macrostructure level: Not all personal narratives include problems or goal-directed actions
- Microstructure level: Personal narratives are about how meaningful the events were to the narrator.
- Personal narratives develop earlier.
- Children with language disorders: significant differences in performance across the two genres on length and cohesion + the quality of a child's performance in one genre only mild-moderately correlated with the child's performance on the other (McCabe et al., 2008).

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Critical relationship

Competence is critical for socio-emotional wellbeing and identity development

Sharing stories builds **and** maintains friendships, helps develop a sense of identity ("life story")



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How to define competence?

Coherence:

The degree to which a story or narrative is understandable, logical, and consistent, both internally and in relation to the audience's expectations.



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Personal narrative coherence & social/emotional wellbeing

Personal narrative coherence is associated with **more positive emotional responses** in the face of traumatic or stressful experiences.

Listeners showed a more positive attitude towards coherent than incoherent narrators + more willingness to interact (Vanaken et al., 2021).

Narrative coherence **predicted emotional well-being** during the COVID-19 pandemic: A two-year longitudinal study (Vanaken et al., 2022).

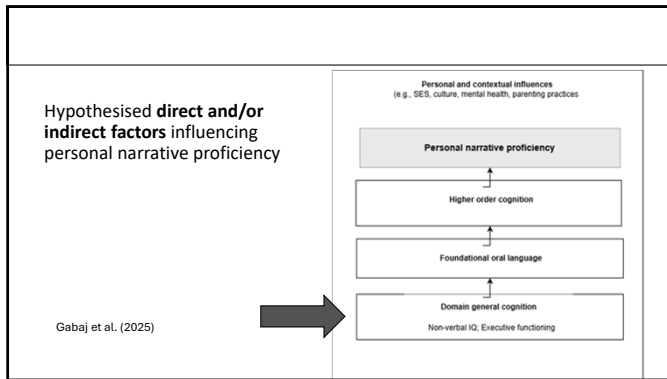
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What influences coherence?

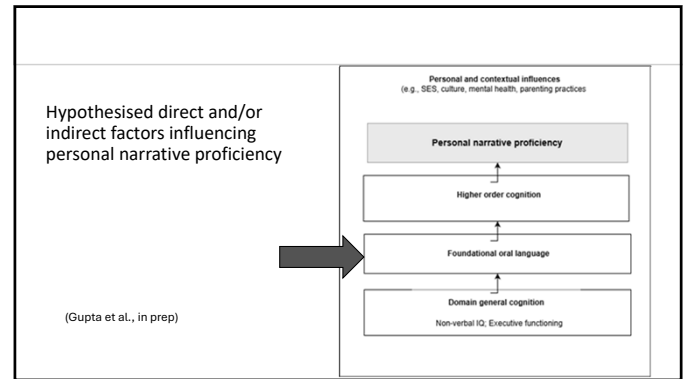
- Cognitive skills
- Foundational language skills
- Personal and contextual factors



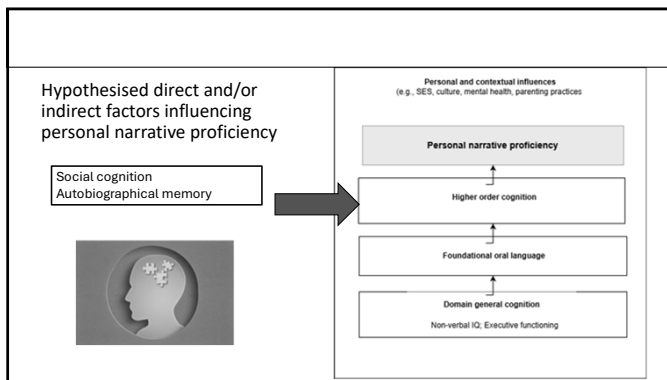
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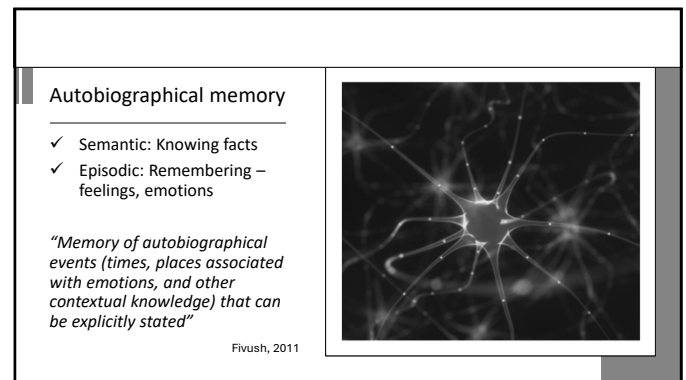
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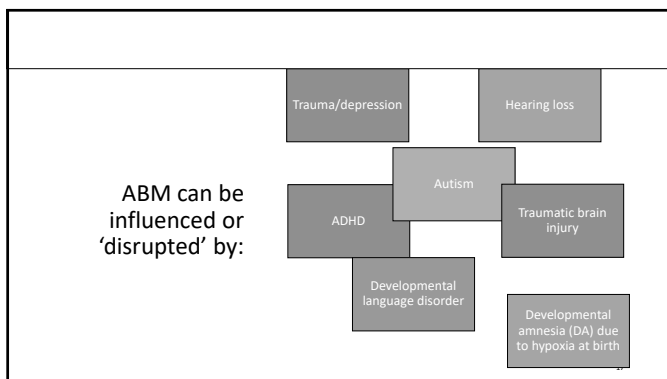
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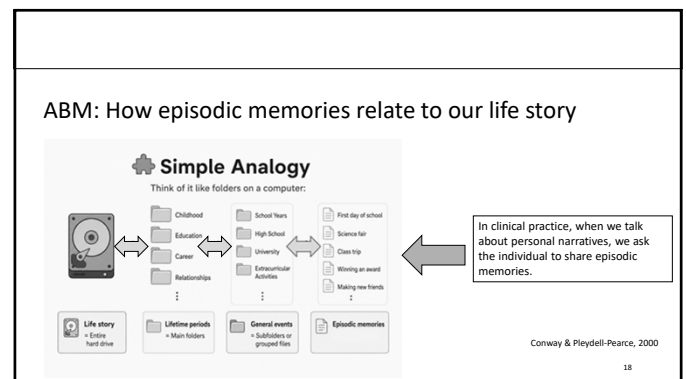
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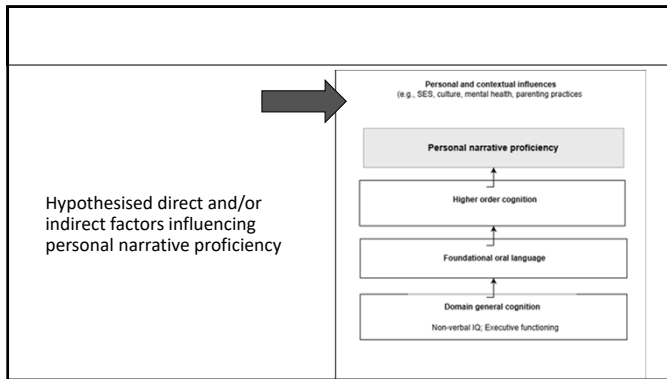
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Cultural variations

"We understand the narratives we hear and read by means of mapping these onto the kinds of narratives we tell" (McCabe, 2017).

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Culture influences PN coherence

Children's personal narrative development is influenced by how their parents and community members engage them in narrative conversation.

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Cultural influences: independence vs interdependence

Mothers from cultures valuing independence used a high elaborative, independence-oriented style, whereas mothers from cultures valuing interdependence used a low-elaborative style that focused on social hierarchy and social norms (Wang & Fivush, 2005).

May influence:

- Topic
- The amount of talking / elaboration
- Structure of the PN

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So how can we evaluate PN 'proficiency'?

- 211 papers since 1984 (children ages 4-18)
- There were >900 different measures across the studies.
- Examples: MLU, NDW, length, cognitive state words, story grammar elements, topics, grammatical accuracy
- Wallis et al. (2026) – adolescents – most research focuses on psychological domains, not language.

Gupta et al., 2026;
Wallis et al., 2026

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How can we elicit personal narratives?

- 57% developed their own protocol.
- 43% used a previously reported one:
 - Conversational Map Procedure (39 studies)
 - Language Sampling protocol (6 studies)
 - Global TALES (11 studies since 2022)
 - Other (35 studies)

(Gupta et al., 2026)

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Who participated in previous research?



- 37,477 children – 1 to 20.949
- English (43%); Spanish (8%), Mandarin (4%)
- 45% monolingual children
- 16% linguistically diverse
- **4% examined performance across languages.**

(Gupta et al., 2026)

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The challenge

Can we develop a global personal narrative assessment tool to:

- accelerate cross-cultural and cross-linguistic research.
- encourage clinical uptake around the world?
- To better serve our children from diverse backgrounds.



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Child Language Committee



GLOBAL TALES
TALKING ABOUT LIVED EXPERIENCES IN STORIES

Global TALES

The Global TALES project started with 10 countries and 8 languages

There are now 35 countries and >35 languages or dialects (>50 Network members)

Most recent translations: German, Czech

We meet every 2 months via Zoom to discuss research, clinical directions, dissemination, translation...



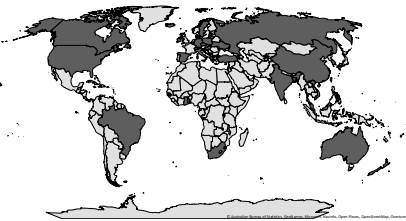
The research community organization for professionals and students in communication sciences and disorders



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Global TALES Network

Australia	Italy
Bangladesh	Lithuania
Belgium	Malaysia
Brazil	New Zealand
Canada	Poland
China	Republic of Ireland
Croatia	Russia
Cyprus	South Africa
Czech Republic	South Korea
Denmark	Spain
Germany	Sweden
Ghana	Switzerland
Greece	Taiwan
Hong Kong	Turkey
Hungary	Ukraine
Iceland	United States
India	Vietnam
Israel	



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The Global TALES protocol

- ❑ No pictures
- ❑ No specific topics
- ❑ No model
- ❑ Simply asking children to 'tell a story'



GLOBAL TALES
TALKING ABOUT LIVED EXPERIENCES IN STORIES

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6 prompts



1. Tell me a story about a time when you felt excited, or really happy.
2. Tell me a story about a time when you felt worried or confused. Perhaps a time when lots of things were happening and you didn't know what to do.
3. Tell me a story about a time when you were really annoyed or angry.
4. Tell me a story about a time when you felt proud of yourself.
5. Tell me a story about a time when you had a problem and you had to fix it. Tell me all about what happened and what you had to do to fix it.
6. Tell me a story about something that has happened to you that was very important to you.

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1. C oh probably this morning in the car.
2. C So when I jumped into the car my mum makes us do these gratefuls about what we're happy for.
3. C and I jumped in.
4. C and Lara told me "can I get my headphones"
5. C and I said "no" because I don't wanna go all the way back inside.
6. C and then Lara was like "fine then"
7. C and then the whole entire time that I was saying my gratefuls she put her podcast on.
8. C and it was on.
9. C and I told her to stop.
10. C and she's like "no" and just kept saying it.
11. C and then mum got really mad.
12. C and then she got mad at me.
13. C and then Lara was like this to me (demonstrates) so annoying
14. C I was so angry.

"Angry"

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Feasibility study (2022)

- Protocol successful in eliciting personal narratives in 10-year-old children (10 countries, 8 languages)
- Translation / adaptation – for meaning!



Westerveld et al., 2022

Australia, Brazil, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, New Zealand, Russia, Taiwan, USA,

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Topics

Five protocol prompts elicited similar topics across countries (1,3,4,5,6)

- 1) Excited: (1) Family event [10/11 groups]; (2) New experience/item
- 2) Worried: (1) School. More divergence
- 3) Annoyed: (1) siblings and peers [11/11]
- 4) Proud: (1) personal achievement, academics, athletics, music
- 5) Problem: (1) peer and family relationships [9/11].
- 6) Important: (1) personal achievement; (2) family event or support.

Australia, Brazil, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, New Zealand, Russia, Taiwan, USA,



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Since 2022 – 14 publications + 3 in press:

Some interesting findings:

- Tele-assessment was successful (Arabic / Hebrew; Ferman & Kavar, 2023)
- Successful with children ages 6 – 14 years and sensitive to development (e.g., Kuvac-Kraljevic et al., 2023).
- Influence of the emotional valence of prompts on coherence (Croatian).
- Group differences between adolescents with/without dyslexia on number of different words (Dutch) (van Vreckem et al., 2023)
- Sensitive to language ability (DLD vs no DLD) – Croatian and Danish – measures of grammar, vocabulary (e.g., Gabaj et al., 2025).

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Further analysis: Three Asian cultures and three English-speaking cultures

New Zealand, Australia, USA & Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea

Similar topics in their personal narratives, but the frequency of these topics within their stories varied.



"Evaluation of the topics of children's personal narratives provides **insight into what is important to the children and the way they view their worlds.**"

This information may **inform clinical approaches** to assessment and intervention with children with communication impairments.

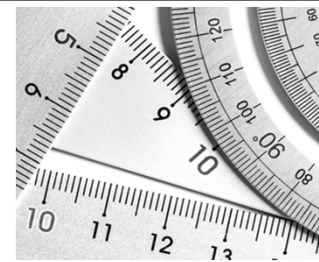
We encourage clinicians to go **beyond** analysis of language structure to consider multiple factors that influence communicative competence"

(Westby, Chen, Lee, & Wong, 2023)

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But what about coherence?

Can we find a measurement tool that can be used across languages and cultures?



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The opportunity

- Global TALES Network members collected personal narrative samples from 10-year-old children, using the same protocol.
- All children were monolingual speakers, did OK at school, were from mid socio-economic backgrounds.
- We focused on 3 prompt types: Happy (positive), Angry (negative), problem-situation (positive neutral negative).



Can we identify similarities and differences in performance among children from diverse cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds?

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Australia
Brazil
Canada (English & French)
Croatia
Cyprus
Denmark
Ghana
Greece
Hong Kong SAR
Iceland

Ireland
Israel (Arabic & Hebrew)
Malaysia
Mainland China
South Korea
Spain
Taiwan
Turkey
USA

21 participant groups
19 countries or regions
18 languages or dialects

417 children
Mean age: 10 years, 2 months

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Personal narrative – our definition

The ability to talk about past events that have been personally experienced.
At least two restricted narrative clauses – i.e., clauses that refer to past personally experienced events that can be put on a timeline.

For example:

- NC: I went to this big shopping complex.
You know, I really like shopping.
NC: So me and my friends took the bus.
NC: It took us 3 hours to get there.

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Coherence coding

Narrative Coherence Coding Scheme (NaCCS; Reese et al., 2011)

1. **Context:** When and where the event took place
2. **Chronology:** are the events in (logical) order
3. **Theme:** Topic maintenance, elaboration, resolution or a connection to autobiographical experience – the emotional point is clear!

4-point coding scheme: from 0 to 3

We are presenting tomorrow at 11.20am

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Hypotheses

1. We expected effects of culture/language group on children's personal narratives.
2. We expected within group differences in response to the emotional valence of the prompt.
3. We expected interaction effects.

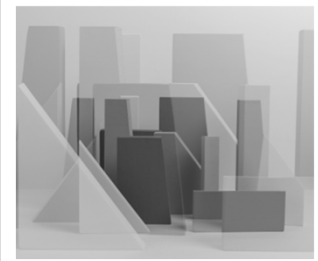


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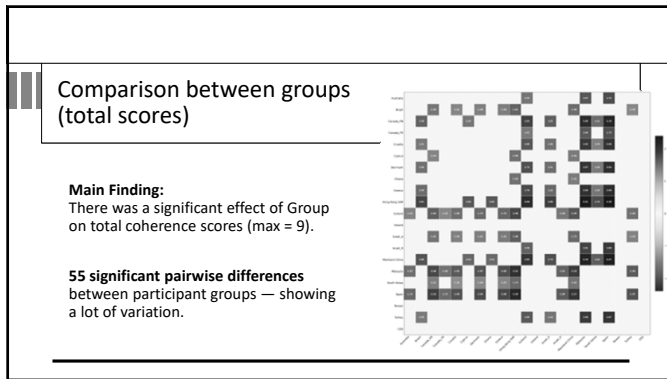
Summary of results

Problem prompt elicited most coherent narratives across groups.
Considerable variability across groups.

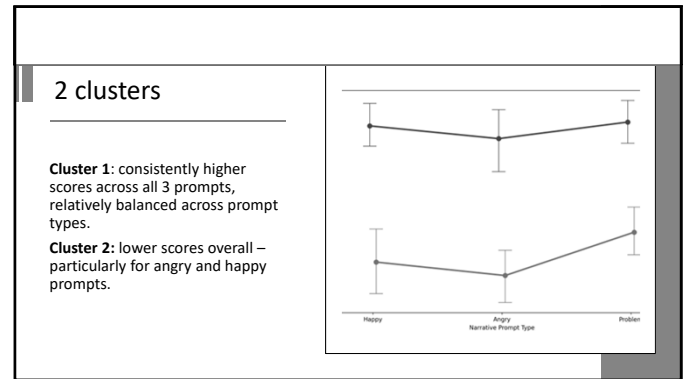
Theme dimension showed the greatest number of between-group differences.



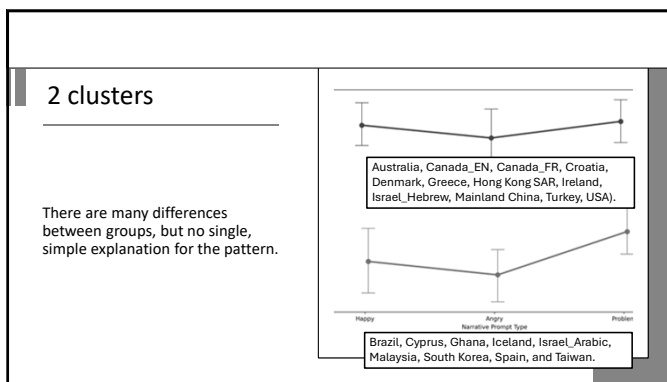
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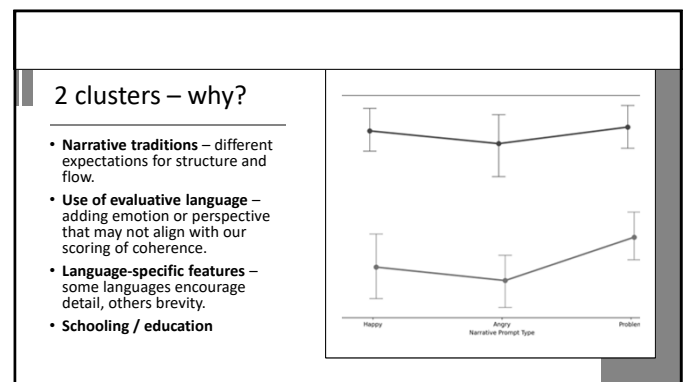
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What do these differences mean?

- ❑ Many of the groups differed from each other in how coherent their narratives were.
- ❑ Cultural, linguistic, and/or stylistic differences may shape how stories are told

Narrative Traditions

Evaluative Language

Language Features

Key point
Narrative coherence doesn't look the same across all cultures and languages — and the scoring system may capture some styles better than others.
BUT ~20 participants per 'group'

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Future directions are

- Elicitation: Familiar vs unfamiliar listener
- Different client groups
- Use of scaffolding
- Children speaking more than 1 language
- Adult performance!
- Analysis measures
- Intervention research

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Overall conclusion - researchers

- ❑ Global initiatives will help move our field forward.
- ❑ Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential.
- ❑ FAIR principles: open access (free for everyone)
- ❑ Big comparative studies lay the foundation for robust findings -> how children understand the world through narratives
- ❑ Cooperation establishes empirical and theoretical foundation for understanding how contextual environment, cognition and language shape TD, DLD, L2 acquisition

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Overall conclusion - clinicians



- ❑ Understanding how culture / language influences narrative proficiency will help with diagnosing language disorders (vs language differences).
- ❑ Personal narratives are the **perfect** context for evaluating a child's functional language skills.
- ❑ Clinician surveys: Time consuming, need for training.
- ❑ Education/early intervention is the key.

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Final thought!

Coaching in maternal reminiscing with preschoolers leads to elaborative and coherent personal narratives in early adolescence

Mothers who had participated in the elaborative reminiscing training when their children were toddlers continued to differ in their reminiscing style with their adolescents.

Enriching mother-child elaborative reminiscing in early childhood has long-term implications for mothers' and children's elaborative reminiscing style and for children's long-term ability to process difficult life events in a coherent narrative form.

Reese et al. (2020). Coaching in maternal reminiscing with preschoolers leads to elaborative and coherent personal narratives in early adolescence. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*

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Our project is listed on Open Science Framework. The protocol itself has been registered
<https://osf.io/ztag6/>

Visit my website: www.marleenwesterveld.com
to download other elicitation materials and our access publications.
Follow us on Instagram: GlobalTalesNetwork



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IALP Child Language Committee members: Nickola Nelson, Carol Westby, Sarah Ferman, Gail Gillon, Cristina McKean, Fernanda Dreux, Kakia Petinou, Yvette Hus, Osnat Segal, Tatjana Tumanova, Ioannis Vogindroukas, Yvette Hyter.

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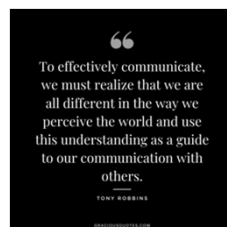
Thank You!

Marleen Westerveld, PhD
m.westerveld@griffith.edu.au
Professor - School of Allied Health, Sport and Social Work, Griffith University, Australia



Website: <https://www.marleenwesterveld.com/>

@dr.marleenwesterveld.slp



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