Check for updates

Applied Cognitive Psychology

WILEY

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Routine Narrative Practice as an Activity to Foster the Development of Children's Narrative Quality

Sonja P. Brubacher[1] | Marleen Westerveld[2] | Hamida Zekiroski[1] | Robyn Holder[1] | Martine B. Powell[1]

[1]Centre for Investigative Interviewing, Griffith Criminology Institute, Griffith University, Nathan, Queensland, Australia | [2]Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Griffith University, Nathan, Queensland, Australia

Correspondence: Sonja P. Brubacher (s.brubacher@griffith.edu.au)

Received: 19 November 2025 | **Revised:** 17 July 2026 | **Accepted:** 21 July 2026

Keywords: episodic memory training | interviewing | narrative practice | open-ended questions | rapport | story grammar

ABSTRACT

The present study investigated whether repeated practice in answering open-ended questions about personal events (*narrative practice*) benefits the narrative quality of unrelated accounts, and whether it had a rapport-building function. Over 4 sessions, children ($N = 86$) aged 6–12 ($M = 8.71$, SD = 1.76; 56% female; 20% Aboriginal) talked with RA1 about personal events (practice condition) or did a craft (control condition). The following week, children watched a film and a new RA asked what happened. Children's narratives were coded for story grammar and accuracy, which were correlated with age. As predicted, the practice condition reported more complex story grammar and more accurate details than the craft condition, with a small increase in errors to follow-up questions, and more frequently endorsed RA1 as a potential disclosure recipient. The results suggest that engaging in ongoing practice responding to open-ended questions about experienced events improves children's narrative abilities and builds rapport.

1 | Introduction

Children can be highly competent informants when adults provide effective scaffolding that supports their narratives. For example, certain types of questions, conversational styles, and preparatory activities can aid children in providing comprehensible narratives of events in their lives. Robyn Fivush's foundational research showed that caregivers who regularly co-construct past experiences with their children through information providing and elaborative questioning tend to have children who produce more elaborative and coherent narratives–as well as improved language and memory skills, attachment, and mental awareness (e.g., Fivush et al. 2006).

In forensic interviewing, a few minutes practicing children in responding to open-ended questions about a neutral or pleasant personal event (e.g., a dance recital, a birthday party) can lead to interviewers obtaining more information from children about a subsequent target event (e.g., abuse allegations, witnessed family violence), especially in response to an initial invitation to talk about "what happened" (Sternberg et al. 1997). This type of *narrative practice* may enhance the overall quality of children's narratives too, but this remains an empirical question. The activity is also believed to have a rapport-building component, but little is known about this aspect (Vroom et al. 2025).

In the current study, we asked whether giving children practice in responding to elaborative, open-ended questioning on multiple occasions might have a general enhancement effect on the quality of children's narratives provided at a later time. In part, the present research was motivated by recent findings that Australian Aboriginal Child Safety Workers engage in casual chat with children and families over long intervals to foster rapport (Holder et al. 2025). This knowledge raises questions about whether such conversations could be enacted with an additional goal—to prepare children to tell high quality narratives in the future. Children who meet with Aboriginal Child Safety Workers sometimes must subsequently talk to forensic interviewers or police officers if there

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2026 The Author(s). *Applied Cognitive Psychology* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

is a criminal investigation (Holder et al. 2025); thus, we were particularly interested in evaluating whether the effects of practice over multiple sessions would transfer to a new interviewer.

We defined narrative quality as being rich in story grammar, which refers to the inclusion and sequencing of story grammar elements (e.g., setting and characters, initiating event) that, together, produce a narrative that a listener can comprehend (Stein and Glenn 1979). Additional measures of narrative quality included the amount and accuracy of details reported. Further, we investigated whether children viewed the repeated opportunities to practice sharing their experiences as having a relationship-building function. In advance of describing the current study, we review what is known about supporting children to provide narrative accounts of their experiences and children's use of story grammar.

1.1 | Supporting Children to Provide Narratives

Personal narratives, and the sharing of those, are an important part of children's development (Fivush 1991). Recent research with 10-year-olds around the world demonstrated that the majority capably responded with narrative accounts in response to topical prompts such as, "Tell me a story about a time you felt really proud of yourself" (Westerveld et al. 2022). Engaging children in dialogue about personally-relevant events serves practical purposes and can have myriad benefits for children and their conversational partners. Accurate and complete information is needed from children in legal, medical, and research settings (Malloy and Stolzenberg 2019). In other arenas, such as education and daily conversation, the objective accuracy of children's narratives may sometimes be less critical, but the completeness and coherence help the child to be understood and for others to relate to them (Newman and McGregor 2006; Westby and Culatta 2016). Being able to talk about one's experiences fosters the establishment of personal narratives, which have implications for meaning making, identity development, coping, and mental health (Fivush et al. 2003, 2008; Vanaken et al. 2022). In a study of science- and nature-related stories told by caregivers to young children, Bühler-Wassmann et al. (in press) found that stories grounded in personal experience were frequently used to construct identity and communicate family experiences and values.

Narrative development also involves increasing capacity to communicate and interpret emotional experiences. Balasingam et al. (in press) found that adolescents incorporated more emotional content into autobiographical narratives with age. The authors argued that older adolescents may have a greater capacity to recognize, articulate, and make meaning of emotional experiences, resulting in more emotionally rich narratives. Their findings support the view that discussing personal experiences helps young people organize not only what happened, but also what those experiences meant to them. Further, sharing about personal experiences fosters healthy caregiver-child relationships (Fivush and Vasudeva 2002). Several approaches have been taken to aid children in providing comprehensive narrative accounts of their experiences. Two particularly relevant approaches, caregiver elaboration and narrative practice, are discussed next.

1.1.1 | Caregiver (Maternal) Elaboration

Robyn Fivush and her colleagues, investigating how caregivers (usually mothers) talk about past events with their children, identified a style of caregiver questioning that promotes richer and more structured responses from children long-term (e.g., Fivush and Fromhoff 1988; Reese and Fivush 1993; Reese et al. 1993; Reese and Newcombe 2007; Waters et al. 2019). Caregivers who are *high elaborative* ask open-ended and wh-questions to elicit more information from their children, as well as expanding on what their children say and introducing new information to keep the conversation going. They work collaboratively with their children to produce richer and longer narratives. *Low elaborative* caregivers tend to use more closed and repeated questions and seek specific answers (Fivush and Fromhoff 1988). Caregiver elaboration with young children is positively associated with child memory and language development (Waters et al. 2019).

Although caregiver elaborative style is an individual difference, it can be taught. In one study, 33 ethnically and linguistically diverse low-income parents of 4-year-olds were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (Reese et al. 2010). The conditions were a dialogic reading condition (parents were taught to ask open-ended and wh- questions to help the child learn vocabulary and describe what was happening on the page), an elaborative reminiscing condition (parents were taught to ask open-ended and wh- questions about shared family events), or a control condition. Compared to the reading group, elaborative reminiscing increased the narrative quality (e.g., character introduction, internal states, temporal terms) and logical connectedness of children's narratives, and supported their story comprehension. These effects occurred regardless of ethnic and language backgrounds.

Recent work suggests that children's narrative development may be influenced not only by elaboration alone, but by broader patterns of conversational support. Using a person-centred approach, Booker et al. (in press) identified distinct maternal discourse profiles characterised by varying levels of elaboration, emotion coaching, indirectness, and emotion dismissing. Specifically, children whose mothers displayed more supportive discourse showed greater narrative elaboration, highlighting the value of considering the broader conversational context in which children discuss past experiences. Relatedly, in a longitudinal study spanning childhood to adolescence, Reese et al. (in press) found that the evaluative/emotional aspects of elaborative reminiscing interactions predicted adolescents' later life-story coherence and autobiographical reasoning.

Much of the caregiver elaboration research has focused on reminiscing: talking about *shared* past experiences (although there are exceptions, e.g., Reese and Brown 2000; Sahin-Acar et al. 2019). This contrasts with the research on narrative practice, described next, where interviewers are naïve about children's experiences. Reese and Brown (2000) differentiated between reminiscing and recounting; the latter referring to conversation about unshared experiences. Reminiscing is more likely than recounting to serve a social bonding function–the building and maintenance of a shared history. Recounting generally serves a more independent function in illustrating one's identity, created

10990720, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.70263 by University Of Technology Sydney, Wiley Online Library on [08/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

through one's experiences and perceptions of those experiences (Reese and Brown 2000). Children and their parents recount to one another in a variety of ways, such as when they share details of their (separate) days (e.g., Sahin-Acar et al. 2019) or retell the plot of a film one watched (Clarke-Stewart and Beck 1999).

Despite differences in reminiscing and recounting, caregiver elaboration predicts children's productivity in both areas (e.g., Alkis et al. 2024; Clarke-Stewart and Beck 1999). Interestingly, nuanced distinctions in how high elaborative mothers engage with their children may predict children's differences in recounting versus reminiscing. A *questioning* maternal elaborative style (e.g., "What happened to us on our walk?", p.6) predicted 40- and 58-month-old children's provision of unique information when *recounting*. In contrast, a *providing* elaborative style (e.g., "It must have set the alarm off cause it was what they call a false alarm", p. 6), predicted children's provision of unique information when *reminiscing* (Reese and Brown 2000). Further, maternal elaboration during reminiscing uniquely predicted children's recounting. Children of mothers who are high elaborative (or who received training in the skill) also provide richer accounts of their past experiences to naïve researchers compared to children of low elaborative mothers (e.g., Haden et al. 1997; Peterson and McCabe 1994; Reese and Newcombe 2007). Relatedly, a maternal reminiscing style that was both elaborative and autonomy supportive (e.g., expanding on topics that their children introduced and exploring children's perspectives) was associated with the number of unique and relevant details maltreated children reported to unfamiliar forensic interviews (Lawson et al. 2021). Children's recounting to naïve questioners is usually the goal of narrative practice, which–similar to *questioning elaborative* and *autonomy supportive* styles–uses open-ended prompts that often request elaboration on details reported by the child to scaffold children's narratives of their experiences.

1.1.2 | Narrative Practice

Narrative practice is a critical activity in the introductory phases of many forensic interview protocols with children (Lamb et al. 2018; Ministry of Justice 2022; National Children's Advocacy Center 2019; Powell and Brubacher 2020). It is also known as episodic memory training because a key goal of the exercise is to elicit children's narrative accounts of a specific event (episode) in time (Lamb et al. 2018; Roberts et al. 2011). The activity consists of providing children with practice narrating a neutral or pleasant event in response to open-ended prompts, before questioning them about a target event. In general, laboratory (Brown et al. 2013; Danby et al. 2017; Roberts et al. 2004; Whiting and Price 2017; Yi and Lamb 2018) and field (Hershkowitz 2009; Sternberg et al. 1997) research indicates benefits of this practice to the amount, accuracy, or efficiency of children's subsequent responses to the same interviewer immediately querying them about a second, unrelated experience. While narrative practice can increase the productivity of children's accounts once they have disclosed a transgression or secret, it has not been shown to increase the likelihood of disclosures (Foster et al. 2023; Lyon et al. 2014; Yi and Lamb 2018).

With its position in the introductory phases of an interview, narrative practice is also believed to have a rapport-building function (Hershkowitz 2011; Roberts et al. 2011), but direct evidence is needed to confirm this notion (Vroom et al. 2025). Further, one study showed that 7–13-year-old children's perceptions of rapport were *lower* in a practice narrative condition compared to an interactional activity (learning a magic trick with the interviewer; Foster et al. 2023).

In some interview circumstances, rapport building is extended over several sessions. For example, in sex trafficking cases, owing to the complex nature of the crime and trauma bonds that may exist between victims and their perpetrators, a protracted period of contact between a victim and interviewer is likely beneficial (Ahern et al. 2017). Highly reluctant children may also meet an interviewer and discuss neutral events during an initial meeting session before returning on another occasion for further rapport building and a forensic interview (Blasbalg et al. 2021). Australian Aboriginal Child Safety Workers also prioritize the ongoing and extended relational elements of their engagements with children and families in the community (Holder et al. 2025). This fosters a sense of trust for children to share the happenings of their lives.

Narrative practice originated with evidence that training in responding to mnemonic techniques (e.g., mental context reinstatement) about a neutral event could increase 8- to 12-year-olds' responsiveness to those same techniques when questioned about an unrelated target event (Saywitz et al. 1992, Experiment 2). Similarly, the goal of narrative practice is to train children in just a few minutes (typically 3–7 min) to respond informatively to open-ended questions about a neutral event, with expected transfer to a target event (Roberts et al. 2011). In this context, open-ended questions are defined as those that encourage multiword responses (compared to option posing questions and narrow directives such as, "what color was it?" or "who was with you?"). Open-ended questions also do not restrict the content of the response (e.g., to a color or name). Instead, the respondent chooses what details to provide, which could include what others did or said, what the respondent felt or thought, and so on (Powell and Snow 2007).

During narrative practice, interviewers are instructed to use almost exclusively open-ended questions to scaffold children's narrative accounts of a pleasant recent event (Brubacher and Powell 2024; Roberts et al. 2011). Scaffolding the narrative means that the prompts provide a coherent framework for children to explain in sequence and elaborate on relevant aspects of their account, without telling children precisely what to report. From a Vygotskian perspective, children learn through narrative practice to tell well-structured stories through scaffolded conversations whereby the adult interlocutor asks questions to help construct the story (Berk and Winsler 1995). This is like what happens in effective caregiver elaboration, except that in narrative practice–owing to its forensic orientation–the interviewers should avoid contributing details. Instead, they must rely on effective questioning. Scaffolding is done with open-ended *breadth* prompts that cast the net wide and seek more event sub-components (e.g., "What happened next", "What else happened?") and *depth* prompts that are relatively narrower in focus and request more information about details the child has already mentioned (e.g., "You said X, tell me more about that"; Feltis et al. 2010).[1] Depth prompts, in particular, demonstrate

10990720, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.70263 by University Of Technology Sydney, Wiley Online Library on [08/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

listening and interest (Brubacher et al. 2019). Through this process, the interviewer and child will, ideally, construct a coherent, detailed, and logically sequenced personal narrative rich in story grammar.

1.2 | Story Grammar

Story grammar is a measure of story structure and contributes to overall coherence. Narratives that are richer in story grammar are easier for others to understand (Paul 2001), which has important implications for interviewers who need to find out what happened (Westcott and Kynan 2004). Various researchers have defined the number and type of story grammar elements slightly differently but they all approximate similar, logically sequenced components of a story. For the purposes of the present research, we adopt Stein and Glenn's (1979) seven elements: (i) the setting, (ii) the initiating event, (iii) the internal response of the person(s) affected by the initiating event, (iv) the plan (i.e., intentions formed in the minds of the affected persons), (v) the attempt (i.e., what the persons do or attempted to do in response), (vi) the direct consequences of the attempt, and (vii) the outcome or resolution. A worked example of these elements using a child forensic interview is found in Snow et al. (2009).

Research on mother–child dialogue during pretend play reveals different narrative styles of caregivers involving higher or lower levels of story grammar and narrative scaffolding. Caregivers high on narrative scaffolding asked questions that reflect our definitions of breadth and depth prompting, and they produced a variety of supports for their children to construct rich recall (Harris and Schroeder 2012). Open-ended prompts naturally elicit more story grammar elements and details compared to specific questions (Feltis et al. 2010; Snow et al. 2009). Children's inclusion of story grammar elements increases with age (Trabasso and Nickels 1992). Large gains tend to occur between the ages of 4 and 9 years old, but narrative competence continues to improve into early adolescence (Feltis et al. 2010; Paul 2001; Snow et al. 2009; Westcott and Kynan 2004).

1.3 | Current Study

Our goal was to investigate whether practicing children in recounting personal experiences in response to open-ended questions over multiple sessions would confer benefits to the quality of children's narratives for a witnessed event to a new adult. Children met with a researcher for four days and engaged in narrative practice or completed a craft (control) activity. A week later, they watched an unrelated film and were asked to tell a new researcher what happened in the film.

We predicted that children who practiced responding to open-ended questions would produce more complex story grammar elements than children in the control group in response to the initial invitation and the entire interview. We also expected the practice condition to report more details from the film, especially in response to the first invitation, compared to the control group. Because recall was immediate, and effects of narrative practice on accuracy have been limited, we did not expect differences in accuracy across conditions. Finally, we predicted that children in the practice condition would be more likely than children in the control condition to endorse the first researcher as someone who could be trusted with sensitive information. Although children in both conditions spent an equal amount of time with the researcher, interviews consisting of open-ended questions tend to make children feel heard and listened to (Brubacher et al. 2019), which we presume would increase perceptions of trust and rapport, especially when held over multiple sessions. Developmental differences were not a focus of this study, but we expected that children's age would be significantly correlated with story grammar production and productivity. All other analyses were exploratory.

2 | Method

2.1 | Participants

We contacted principals in the Northern Territory, Australia. Six schools agreed to take part, but one was ultimately unable to participate due to time constraints. Guardian consent forms were signed for 104 children, but due to scheduling difficulties or child absences, only 86 children fully participated. Participants who attended at least three of the four event sessions (practice or craft) and the interview were retained. Nearly all the retained children ($n = 77$, 90%) attended all five sessions. Three children in the practice and six in the craft condition missed one event session.

Children ranged in age from 6 to 12 years ($M = 8.71$, SD = 1.76). Just over half were female ($n = 48$, 56%) and the remainder were male ($n = 38$). Children's caregivers were also asked whether their child was Aboriginal[2]; 17 said yes, which is a proportion of the sample consistent with the enrolled student population in Northern Territory. After participation, children received certificates. Children, their teachers, and their families were sent study debriefing information in the form of a short, animated video. Teachers and principals received group-based results, narrative language assessments for each child (carried out by speech pathologists), and two 30-min videos that provided educational information on how to carry out the narrative practice sessions with children in their classrooms. Ethical approval was obtained from Griffith University 2023/256, Menzies 2023-4574, and NT Education Ref. 23236.

2.2 | Materials and Procedure

No Artificial Intelligence Generated Content (AIGC) tools were used in the current research. Children whose guardians had signed informed consent forms were randomly assigned to the narrative practice condition or the craft (control) condition. Each condition involved children attending four sessions in one week in their local school.

Two research assistants (RA1, RA2) conducted the practice and craft sessions (and each conducted an approximately equal number in each condition). RA1 was a postdoctoral fellow and RA2 was a M.Ed. Both RAs had been trained to conduct open-ended interviews with multiple practice sessions until the research team was satisfied with performance. A week after the child's last practice or craft session, a research fellow (RA3) conducted individual

10990720, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.70263 by University Of Technology Sydney, Wiley Online Library on [08/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

interviews for the testing session. Children completed a language assessment with a speech pathologist about a month later.

2.2.1 | Practice and Craft Sessions

There were 44 children in the Practice condition. Children in this condition met individually with RA1 or RA2. In a quiet space away from other children, the RA asked the child to tell her about everything they had done so far that school day (or yesterday if the child's interview was early in the morning); the last time they engaged in a hobby, sport, or something else enjoyable; a recent family celebration or event; and a recent time the child felt happy or proud. Each topic was prompted in a different session. The order of topics was largely as reported here. At each session, the RA used open-ended invitations, and breadth and depth prompts to find out what happened, for 5 min. There were no direct attempts to teach story grammar. Rather, the use of initial invitations, breadth, and depth questions together has been shown to naturally elicit story grammar elements (Feltis et al. 2010) by interleaving prompts that launch a narrative (*initial invitation*, e.g., "Tell me everything that happened that time your team won the championship. Start from the beginning"), advance the topic logically and chronologically (*breadth*, e.g., "What happened then?", "What happened after you kicked the ball?") and request elaboration on what the child has reported (*depth*, e.g., "You said the ball almost went in–tell me more about that part"). An anonymized example of a practice narrative can be found on the OSF. Children received a sheet of stickers at the end of each session. Practice interviews were monitored by the research team for quality all the way through data collection.

The other half of the children ($n = 42$) participated in the Craft (control) condition in small groups of 4–5 children. They completed their activities within the same 5-min time frame as the Practice condition. The RA leading the craft used a timer. Natural dialogue during the activity was permitted (e.g., questions about the craft, children's likes and dislikes) but the RA was not to elicit information about specific events from the children. Children with unfinished crafts were given a bag and supplies (e.g., yarn, beads) to complete it later. The crafts were a yarn heart (wrapping yarn around a cardboard shape), a beaded bracelet, a woven paper fish or a chatterbox, and a painted rock.

2.2.2 | Testing Session

A week after the last practice or craft session, RA3 took children individually to a quiet space. First, children watched the Flowerpot Incident film while RA3 busied herself with other tasks (to avoid the perception that she had seen the film). The Flowerpot Incident has been used in previous studies to measure narrative language production (Snow and Powell 2005; Snow et al. 2016) and responses to open-ended questions (Denne et al. 2024). It is 90 s long and shows a woman watering plants on a balcony and dropping water on a man and his dog walking below. At the end of the film, the problem is resolved, and the woman and the man smile at each other. It is an ambiguous event that requires the viewer to make inferences about people's thoughts and motivations and has all key elements of story grammar.

After the film ended, RA3 invited the child's narrative for the film, by saying, "Start from the beginning and tell me everything that happened in the film." After the child finished speaking, RA3 delivered six more open-ended prompts, three of each breadth and depth, in alternating order. Thus, all children received the same number and type of prompts in the same order, but the topics of the depth prompts varied depending on the information children provided (because these prompts query more information on details previously provided by the child).

At the conclusion of the interview, RA3 introduced the child to two further tasks that were included as part of a broader project (children's perceptions of what helps them talk about sensitive topics, and what children could remember about the four event sessions in which they participated). These tasks were unrelated to the current study, with two exceptions, described next:

In the task measuring children's perceptions of what helps them talk about sensitive topics, children were asked who they could tell if "something bad" happened. Something bad was not defined. Children were first offered the opportunity to respond freely, and their response was recorded. Then they were presented with options including the RA who had done the practice or craft sessions with them. The options were meant to generate further ideas (i.e., a teacher, another adult, "someone else"?), rather than being restricting (i.e., children were encouraged to choose as many options as they wanted to). For the purposes of this study, we recorded dichotomously whether the child identified the RA or not.

In the memory task, RA3 first delivered a broad invitation for children to tell "What happened when [RA1/RA2] came?" Although not intended to be part of the current study, during coding of the memory details we noticed that children provided interesting and relevant reflections on their experiences. These were recorded and are presented descriptively.

2.2.3 | Receptive Vocabulary Assessment

In a separate session, approximately a month after the testing session, children met individually with certified practicing speech pathologists. Various language assessments were conducted for a larger study to yield local benchmarks for oral narrative performance in school-aged children in Northern Territory. Of interest to the present study, a receptive vocabulary task (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test [PPVT-5], Dunn 2018) was administered to ensure the conditions were comparable in language ability. Although it would have been preferable to conduct these sessions prior to the experimental manipulation, it was practically infeasible. The PPVT-5 was not expected to be affected by the manipulation.

2.3 | Story Grammar Coding

The interviews about the flowerpot incident were transcribed and coded for story grammar elements (Stein and Glenn 1979). The response to the initial invitation to produce the narrative was coded separately (i.e., a 'free' narrative) and assigned a score. This procedure reflects standard practice in language assessment because it is a pure measure of what children can

10990720, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.70263 by University Of Technology Sydney, Wiley Online Library on [08/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

produce without assistance, and some studies on narrative practice showed specific benefits for responses to the initial invitation (Brubacher et al. 2011; Sternberg et al. 1997; Whiting and Price 2017). Then, the remainder of the responses were considered as part of the 'complete' narrative, and a second score was given to represent how much more complex the narratives could become from further open-ended prompting.

Children's initial and complete narratives could each receive a maximum score of 14, comprising 0–2 points for each of the following categories: setting (e.g., woman watering plants), initiating event (e.g., water falls on the man's head), response (e.g., man gets wet), plan (e.g., the man looks around, yells "Hey!"), attempt (e.g., the man bangs on the door), direct consequences (e.g., the woman answers the door and sees the man and dog), resolution (e.g., the woman cuddles the dog and the man smiles). Zero points were given when the element was missing, 1 point was given for a basic description (as in the examples provided), 2 points were awarded for inferences (e.g., with regard to response, inferring that the man felt angry or surprised, or that the woman felt scared or guilty) and/or a high level of detail (e.g., for setting, explaining that the woman was up several stories on a balcony of a low-rise apartment building and the man and the dog were walking up the street below). The coding rubric can be found on the OSF.

2.4 | Detail Coding

Children's transcripts were coded for the number of unique and meaningful details they reported about the film, and the accuracy of the details. Coding of meaningful details was adapted from Fivush (1991), as many studies on children's autobiographical memories have used this scheme. Unique and meaningful details were those that referred to people (e.g., "the lady", "a dog"), actions (e.g., "dropped", "spilled"), objects (e.g., "a bucket", "plants"), locations (e.g., "the street", "*on* the man"), and attributes (e.g., "wet", "cute"). Additionally, we coded numerical and temporal terms (e.g., "three times", "next"), conditional terms (e.g., "because", "when"), and any other detail that added unique meaning to the utterance. Repeated details were not counted.

After parsing the transcripts into meaningful details, the details were coded as accurate if they appeared in the film *or* were logical inferences based on what was shown in the film. A frequent example of the latter is that many children said the woman in the film "came down the stairs and opened the door". The film does not show the woman coming down the stairs, but she is up high on a balcony when the film begins and, when she opens the door, the stairs are clearly visible behind her. Details were coded as inaccurate if they were fabrications that did not match the film content.

2.5 | Reliability

The first author and a research assistant otherwise unassociated with the current study and blind to study hypotheses trained together on the story grammar and detail coding, using 11 interviews (13%). Two independent random samples of 17 additional interviews (20%) were selected for reliability for story grammar and detail coding, respectively. None of the interviews contained information about children's experimental condition.

Agreement for story grammar was high, at 87.4%, yielding identical responses for 104 scores (Cohen's weighted Kappa = 0.792). The 15 discrepant scores were resolved through discussion and only differed by one point (typically assigned a 2 by one coder and 1 by the other). The disagreements appeared in all seven subcomponents; it was not the case that any specific subcomponent was more difficult to code than others. The research assistant coded the remainder of the sample. The subcomponents were collapsed for main analyses, but readers interested in further details can consult Data S1 on the OSF.

Agreement for number of unique details was excellent (percent agreement 96.1%). Classification accuracy of details as accurate or inaccurate was very good, Cohen's Kappa = 0.817. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, and coding of the remaining transcripts was split evenly between the coders.

Finally, the records of whether the child identified RA1 or RA2 as someone they could talk to if something bad happened were double checked against the audio tapes by the RA who did the story grammar reliability. Two omissions were identified and added to the records. The PPVT-5 was automatically scored using an online scoring system.

3 | Results

3.1 | Preliminary Analysis

The datafile is available on the OSF. Four children were missing PPVT scores (one in the practice condition and three in the control). Their missing data points were replaced with the mean. We first checked whether there were any differences in age in months or language ability (PPVT standard scores) between the conditions with independent-samples *t*-tests. No comparisons were significant (see Table 1). With 2 × 2 chi squared analyses, we evaluated the distributions of boys versus girls, children identified as Aboriginal versus not, and the RA with whom the children engaged (RA1 vs. RA2). At a corrected alpha level (0.05/6 tests = 0.008) no comparisons were significant. Only one difference was significant at $p < 0.05$; there was a greater representation of Aboriginal children in the Practice condition compared to the control. Yet, Aboriginal children did not score differently on any measures: story grammar score (first $p = 0.347$, full $p = 0.716$), number of accurate details (first $p = 0.533$, follow-up $p = 0.356$), number of inaccurate details (first $p = 0.120$, follow-up $p = 0.944$), proportional accuracy (first $p = 0.116$, follow-up $p = 0.628$) or PPVT ($p = 0.129$).

Next, we evaluated whether correlations existed between age or PPVT standard score and story grammar or productivity. For a complete table of correlations see Data S2 on the OSF. Children's age in months was correlated with measures of story grammar and productivity, $rs \geq 0.239$, $ps \leq 0.05$, so it was included as a covariate in subsequent analyses. Age was

10990720, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.70263 by University Of Technology Sydney, Wiley Online Library on [08/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 1 | Comparisons across experimental conditions.

	Condition		
	Practice	**Control**	***p***
n	44	42	
Continuous variables			
Age in months range	74–145	79–149	
Age in months mean (SD)	106 (18)	109 (22)	0.547
PPVT-SS range	60–140	65–141	
PPVT-SS (SD)	99.06 (18.59)	101.71 (16.71)	0.490
Dichotomous variables			
% female	50%	62%	0.266
% Aboriginal	30%	10%	**0.02**
% Research Assistant 1	47%	53%	0.348

Note: PPVT-SS = Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – Standard Score (Dunn 2018).

not correlated with PPVT standard scores, r (84) = −0.119. PPVT score was not correlated with any dependent measures, rs ≤ −0.164.

3.2 | Effects of Condition on Story Grammar

To account for the association between children's age and their story grammar scores, we analyzed the data with two 2 (condition: practice, control) analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) including age in months as a covariate. The model for the response to the initial invitation was significant, $F(2, 83) = 14.89$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.264$. There was a main effect of condition, F (1, 83) = 6.173, $p = 0.015$, $\eta^2_p = 0.069$ and the age covariate was significant, F (1, 83) = 25.17, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.232$. As predicted, children in the practice condition ($M = 7.80$, SD = 2.08) produced more complex and detailed story grammar in response to the initial invitation compared to children in the control condition ($M = 6.69$, SD = 2.07).

We repeated the analysis with the story grammar score for the whole interview to determine whether the practice continued to have an effect even after further open-ended prompts were delivered. In fact, the size of the effect increased. The model was significant, $F(2, 83) = 21.66$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.343$. There was a main effect of condition, F (1, 83) = 13.93, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.144$, and the age covariate was significant, F (1, 83) = 31.97, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.278$. Children in the practice condition ($M = 10.06$, SD = 1.97) obtained a higher story grammar score compared to children in the control condition ($M = 8.47$, SD = 1.97). These analyses were repeated without the age covariate to confirm that effects held (see Data S2). The change in scores from responses to the initial invitation versus the entire interview did not differ across conditions, t (84) = 1.33, $p = 0.188$, Cohen's d = 0.286. With further open-ended prompting, children in the practice condition increased their average story grammar score by 2.25 (SD = 1.60) and the control condition by 1.79 (SD = 1.65).

3.3 | Effects of Condition on Amount and Accuracy of Details

Children reported on average 69.63 (SD = 26.62, range 9–149) total details in their interviews. As expected, most of these were accurate ($M_{accurate}$ 68.24, SD = 25.90, range 9–142; $M_{inaccurate}$ 1.38, SD = 1.84, range 0–9). Due to the rarity of inaccurate details, we conducted analyses on the *amount* of information reported using accurate details as the dependent variables (i.e., accurate details in response to the first invitation, and to the remainder of the interview). In each analysis, there was one outlier > 3SD above the mean; these were two different children in the control condition. As the results were the same with or without them, they were retained. Analyses were 2 (condition: practice, control) analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) to account for the significant association between age and number of accurate details.

Children in the practice condition ($M = 41.34$, SD = 11.17) reported more accurate details in response to the first invitation than children in the control condition ($M = 34.50$, SD = 16.25), F (1, 83) = 9.25, $p = 0.003$, $\eta^2_p = 0.10$. Children in the practice condition ($M = 34.36$, SD = 19.58) also reported more accurate details in response to the remainder of the interview prompts than children in the control condition ($M = 25.93$, SD = 13.73), F (1, 83) = 6.41, $p = 0.013$, $\eta^2_p = 0.072$.

Investigations of the accuracy of children's reports were impacted by ceiling effects. Data were non-normal and highly skewed. There were 41 children (47%) who reported no inaccurate details at any point in their interviews. Inaccuracies were especially rare in response to the first invitation ($M = 0.36$, SD = 0.85, range = 0–4; proportional accuracy $M = 0.99$, SD = 0.02) with 68 children not reporting any. To follow-up prompts, proportional accuracy remained high ($M = 0.97$, SD = 0.05). We approached these data in two ways: non-parametric analyses allowed us to compare conditions on proportional inaccuracy (even though it was very low overall), and dichotomizing the accuracy data (i.e., no errors, any errors) and testing with chi squared analyses provided an indication of whether the *likelihood* of erring differed across conditions. Both approaches converged on the same conclusions: (a) no condition differences arose in response to the first invitation, ps ≥ 0.305; and (b) in response to continued prompting, children in the practice condition made proportionally more errors ($M = 0.04$, SD = 0.05, $Mdn = 0.03$) and, as a group, were more likely to report an erroneous detail (66%), compared to children in the craft condition ($M = 0.02$, SD = 0.04, $Mdn = 0.00$; likelihood of reporting an error, 31%), Mann–Whitney $U = 1226.50$, $z = 2.81$, $p = 0.005$; X^2 (1, $N = 86$) = 10.51, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.350$.

3.4 | Perceptions of the Research Assistant

As part of a larger study, children were asked a series of questions to learn about what things help children tell when

10990720, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.70263 by University Of Technology Sydney, Wiley Online Library on [08/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

"something bad has happened", including who they could tell. A chi-square test of independence indicated a significant association between condition and response, X^2 (1, $N = 86$) = 4.88, $p = 0.027$, Cramer's $V = 0.238$. Children in the practice condition were more likely to endorse RA1/2 as someone who would be a good person to tell (55%, $n = 24$) than children in the control condition (31%, $n = 13$).

3.5 | Perceptions of the Activity

When asked what happened when RA1/2 visited, 11 children in the practice and two in the control condition spontaneously commented on their perceptions of the activity. Control children reported positive affect. One child indicated that the activity helped them "feel better" and the other found it to be a calming break from schoolwork. The children from the practice condition were also positive about their experiences, and many of their spontaneous responses tapped into principles of open-ended questions that have been reported elsewhere (Brubacher et al. 2019). It was clear from several children's responses that the questioning style made them feel heard, respected, supported, and safe. It was interesting that some children perceived that the RA asked "a heap of questions" and one child's description of the task goal (to be elaborate about cooking an egg) illuminates how children interpret the purpose of the conversations. The quotes from the 11 children in the practice condition are found in Table 2.

4 | Discussion

A major component of Robyn Fivush's research has been devoted to identifying the myriad benefits (for children and their interlocutors) of supporting children to tell structured narratives about their experiences (Fivush et al. 2003; Fivush et al. 2008; Fivush and Vasudeva 2002; see also Vanaken et al. 2022; Westby and Culatta 2016; Westerveld et al. 2022). This body of research, in part, motivated us to ask whether interviewers who give children multiple opportunities over time to practice responding to open-ended questions about personal events could lead to an increase in children's story grammar, productivity, and accuracy when recounting an unrelated event, elicited by a new interviewer, relative to a control group. As predicted, children who received practice provided higher quality narratives (more complex story grammar and accurate details) than children who engaged in a craft activity, in response to the first invitation and to further open-ended prompting (which is known to elicit story grammar; Feltis et al. 2010; Snow et al. 2009).

There was a minor cost of increased productivity (see Kulkofsky et al. 2008) and follow-up prompting (Brown et al. 2013): children in the practice condition were more likely than control children to err in response to follow-up prompts, but not in response to the first invitation. Responses to the first invitation have been shown to be more accurate than responses to follow-up prompts among children and adults (Brown et al. 2013; Kontogianni et al. 2020).

Despite a statistically significant reduction in accuracy to follow-up prompts for children in the practice condition, the raw difference between the conditions was <1 erroneous detail. Further, children's errors were generally minor and tended to be embellishments on details they had already provided (e.g., saying that the dog *licked the girl* when she was cuddling it) rather than confabulations of entirely new details.

A possible reason for the increase in errors to follow-up prompts for children in the practice condition only is that there were no ground rules delivered to children at any point in this study–including during their narrative practice sessions. They were not told, for example, that guessing was inappropriate, which has been shown to increase "don't know" responses to open-ended

TABLE 2 | Children's spontaneous descriptions of the practice activities.

- She was kind, she was politeful, and she let me talk.
- She would often say, 'you're telling us, so we're going to be learning from you'. It sounds weird but it feels like I'm the boss. It was fun, exciting a bit.
- I got to say something I was scared of, and I haven't actually ever told anyone that *(this was the time the child 'liked best').*
- She respects what has happened.
- She learnt a lot about me.
- I loved spending time with her. I was a bit shy at first because I'm shy when I meet new people that are adults, 'cause I don't know what their personality is. But then we started, then I started not being a bit shy.
- I told her what happened. Sometimes it's a little bit boring, but sometimes it's fun.
- She was really kind. She helped us with the story, offering that, if we were stuck, she was like, 'Give a little bit more'.
- When she asked me a heap of questions, I was really happy, and I wanted to come back again.
- She asked me lots of questions, I answered them, and that was really fun.
- She asks me questions, describe what I'm doing. Like, if I was just – if I said I was cooking a egg, and then I went to sleep, RA1 would tell me, describe about the egg. Was the egg scrambled? Was the egg just, um, some yolk? And all that. (*Note that this description is inconsistent with the actual questioning, but consistent with the overall goal of the questioning*—i.e., *to be as elaborate as possible*).

10990720, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.70263 by University Of Technology Sydney, Wiley Online Library on [08/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

questions among 5- to 9-year-olds who practiced the rule, compared to children who were told ground rules with no practice examples (Danby et al. 2015; practicing ground rules is well-understood to increase the likelihood of rule use; Brubacher et al. 2015). Further, compared to the control, children in the practice condition had already provided a greater number of accurate details and more complex story grammar in their first narrative response. Often, their initial responses were quite complete. For experimental control, all children received the same number of prompts. This means that we set up an artificial interview situation whereby children may have been prompted to elaborate on details for which they had already exhausted their recall, which can lead to errors (Brown et al. 2013). Thus, in response to further requests for greater elaboration (when they had already provided more accurate details in their initial response compared to the control condition)–and without any instructions to be accurate during open-ended recalls–children in the practice condition may have felt an obligation to provide information. These findings underscore the applied value of (a) ensuring children are prepared to give their best evidence in response to the first interview invitation and (b) delivering ground rules (Brubacher et al. 2015; Brubacher and Brown 2026).

This research represents the first demonstration that open-ended narrative practice can support the provision of story grammar for an unrelated event (in addition to its established benefits on one or more of amount, efficiency, and accuracy; Brown et al. 2013; Danby et al. 2017; Hershkowitz 2009; Roberts et al. 2004; Sternberg et al. 1997; Whiting and Price 2017; Yi and Lamb 2018; *cf.* Foster et al. 2023). The research also demonstrates that narrative practice can foster rapport. Children in the practice condition were more likely than children in the control condition to endorse the RA as a trusted adult–someone who could receive disclosures about negative experiences. Of course, our study was not designed to test whether children disclosed to the RA at a greater rate in the practice than control condition, and this could be examined in future. Both RAs had conducted practice and craft sessions, and children in both conditions had spent an equal amount of time with the RA. Thus, the results were not simply driven by familiarity. Finally, 11 children in the practice condition spontaneously shared perceptions that provided some insight into the socioemotional mechanisms of the activity. These findings have implications for theoretical understanding of narrative practice as a rapport-building activity, an approach that has been emphasized by research produced with Aboriginal child safety practitioners (Holder et al. 2025).

Narratives are often told for the purposes of relating to others (Fivush and Vasudeva 2002; Haden et al. 1997; Reese and Brown 2000), so it makes intuitive sense that narrative practice over multiple sessions might make children feel closer to the adult interviewer. Bühler-Wassmann et al. (in press), for example, found that caregivers frequently told personal stories because they reflected children's identities, family experiences, and valued forms of knowledge. Their findings suggest that storytelling serves relational and identity-related functions in addition to informational ones. The present findings are consistent with this perspective in that children who participated in repeated narrative practice appeared not only to improve their narrative performance but also to view the interviewer as a trusted and supportive conversational partner.

Multiple engagements with the interviewer may explain why the present results differ from those of Foster et al. (2023). They showed that when experimenters engaged with 7- to 13-year-old children in a single session for around 7 min, children indicated greater perceptions of rapport (and, among the older children, were more likely to disclose another adult's transgression) in an interactional versus practice condition. Other methodological differences include that Foster et al. measured actual disclosures of a staged transgression and their interactional condition was one-on-one, unlike our craft condition. Despite that the craft condition was typically groups of four children engaged directly with RA1/2 to complete an activity, individual sessions may have enhanced rapport (but would be unlikely to improve story grammar, narrative completeness, or accuracy).

In research on caregiver elaboration, children converse with already familiar adults, and often about shared experiences (e.g., Fivush et al. 2006). Such dialogue can promote children's healthy social and cognitive development (Reese et al. 2010, in press). Booker et al. (in press) similarly demonstrated that children's narrative and emotional outcomes are associated with maternal discourse profiles that incorporate varying levels of elaboration, emotion coaching, indirectness, and emotion dismissing. Their findings suggest that children's narrative competence is associated with holistic patterns of maternal reminiscing discourse rather than any single discourse behaviour considered in isolation. The present findings extend this literature by showing that repeated opportunities to discuss personal experiences with a non-caregiver adult may also strengthen children's narrative performance. Children and adults sharing stories is a social interaction. While it is beneficial to know that high elaborative styles can be trained (Reese and Newcombe 2007; Reese et al. 2010), that a questioning-elaborative style predicts children's provision of new information when recounting (Reese and Brown 2000), and that the developmental benefits of reminiscing appear to extend well beyond early childhood (Reese et al. in press), not all children have caregivers who use elaborative approaches to scaffold their narrative development (Harris and Schroeder 2012). Yet, the present results suggest that narrative practice–especially delivered repeatedly–could aid these children to provide better structured, more detailed narratives of their experiences.

The findings have important implications for professionals who speak with children about the events in their lives. For example, Aboriginal Child Safety Workers implicitly develop rapport over weeks or months with children and families (Holder et al. 2025). Workers drop in on children at their homes or spend time with them in activities like fishing while engaging them in chitchat. Such professionals could likely support the development of children's narrative quality while talking with them about neutral or positive events to foster rapport. The results also inform extended interview models where highly reluctant children meet with forensic interviewers to build relationships before allegations are discussed (Blasbalg et al. 2021).

It is critical that those who wish to develop children's communication skills with narrative practice do so with the right type of questions. Powell and Snow's (2007) definition of open-ended prompts as those that encourage elaboration and do not constrain responses is key because some literatures define all recall

10990720, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.70263 by University Of Technology Sydney, Wiley Online Library on [08/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

questions as open-ended. Recall questions include the directive "wh−/how" questions, but these are less likely than open-ended questions to produce story grammar (Feltis et al. 2010; Snow et al. 2009). Further, directive questions (e.g., "Who was there?", "Where did it happen?") impose the structure of the event–and the interviewers' interests–on the respondent (Brubacher and Powell 2024). They direct interviewees to provide specific information sought by the interviewer. In contrast, open-ended questions allow interviewees to tell their stories in their own words, at their own pace, and to highlight the details that they remember best or were most important (Powell and Snow 2007).

The condition differences in story grammar and detail accuracy scores in the current study were significant but small. It is possible that, with continued sessions, children in the practice condition would have evidenced even more benefits. This prediction could be tested in other settings where communication practice is already a goal, such as in education. Open-ended questions can be used by teachers in classrooms to enhance children's oral narrative skills. For example, Canadian preschoolers replied to open-ended, wh-, and topic-continuing questions with more complex and elaborated responses than to closed questions. Yet, the educators used three times more closed than open-ended questions (De Rivera et al. 2005). More recent research suggests there has been little change in this pattern (Hamel et al. 2021). Thus, there could be benefits in trialing such practice for teachers as well as children.

4.1 | Limitations

The findings of the present study should be considered in light of a few limitations. First, we did not conduct a power analysis for this research because the practical constraints of interstate data collection meant that we were restricted to the numbers of children we could interview in predetermined travel periods. Nevertheless, the effect sizes obtained were medium to large (Richardson 2011). Thus, it is likely that the manipulation had the intended effect. This notion is—to some extent—bolstered by the fascinating comments from a small number of children in the practice condition who recognized that the task was implicitly teaching them how to provide comprehensive narratives. Note that we did not directly ask them what they thought of the activity; we just asked them what happened.

Closely related to the practical constraints on the sample size was the wide age range. The goals of the present study were not to measure developmental differences in story grammar, but it is a skill that improves with age (Feltis et al. 2010; Paul 2001; Snow et al. 2009). Although conditions did not differ in mean age, the wide range obscures our abilities to determine whether narrative practice fosters story grammar across ages or whether it is more beneficial for particular age groups. This question is worthy of further investigation.

Finally, we opted to omit a delay between the target event and narrative interview because our primary focus was on how ongoing narrative practice develops children's story grammar (rather than memory). Our results may not generalize to events that must be recalled after a delay when memory has faded. Yet, related research provides hints that improvements in narrative quality measures should predict better subsequent memory (Hill et al. 2025), albeit with potentially increased error rates, at least for very young children (Kulkofsky et al. 2008). We encourage replication of the present design with a delay between target event and interview.

4.2 | Conclusions

When adults elicit children's experiences with non-leading open-ended questions (e.g., "Tell me what happened") and provide socioemotional support, the accuracy and completeness of children's information is heightened (Lavoie et al. 2021) and children feel heard and better able to share their experiences (Brubacher et al. 2019). The present study provided evidence that open-ended narrative practice can be used to aid children in providing narratives of events that contain more detailed or complex story grammar elements, making them easier for others to understand. Coherent information from children can assist trusted adults to make informed decisions, such as appropriate referrals to mental health services, medical professionals, and the justice system. The results also demonstrated that giving children a voice to describe their own experiences in their own words has socioemotional benefits. It may enhance children's experience of rapport with an interviewer and empower them to feel like the experts in explaining what happened to them. Or, as one child in the current study explained, "it feels like I'm the boss."

Author Contributions

Hamida Zekiroski: investigation, project administration, writing – review and editing, resources, validation. **Martine B. Powell:** conceptualization, funding acquisition, writing – review and editing, project administration, supervision, methodology. **Sonja P. Brubacher:** conceptualization, writing – original draft, methodology, formal analysis, funding acquisition, writing – review and editing, data curation, validation, visualization. **Marleen Westerveld:** writing – review and editing, methodology, resources. **Robyn Holder:** investigation, methodology, writing – review and editing, project administration.

Acknowledgments

This study was not pre-registered. Open access publishing facilitated by Griffith University, as part of the Wiley - Griffith University agreement via the Council of Australasian University Librarians.

Funding

The research was funded by an Australia Research Council Linkage Grant (LP200200976) to M.B.P. and S.P.B.

Ethics Statement

Ethical approval was obtained from Griffith University 2023/256 and Menzies School of Health Research 23-4574.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/7uyej/overview?view_only=0276030b0dbe49f18f8c6831f19d4477.

10990720, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.70263 by University Of Technology Sydney, Wiley Online Library on [08/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Endnotes

[1] Depth prompts are also referred to as cued invitations and breadth prompts are most similar to general invitations (see Brubacher and Powell 2024).

[2] The partners we worked with for this research project described themselves as Aboriginal. They did so when discussing their professional roles and also more generally. In local and more informal spaces, people may also refer to the names of their 'mob' or 'tribe' or 'language group'.

References

Ahern, K., L. Sadler, M. E. Lamb, and K. Gariglietti. 2017. "Practitioner Perspectives on Child Sexual Exploitation: Rapport Building With Young People." *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 26, no. 1: 78–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2016.1257529.

Alkis, A., Y. İlgün, and B. Sahin-Acar. 2024. "Mother–Child Memory Conversation and Children's Independent Memory: The Roles of Maternal Characteristics." *Memory* 32, no. 8: 968–980. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658211.2024.2373897.

Balasingam, S., S. D. Spyksma, T. Heffer, and L. C. Malloy. in press. "Age and Gender Effects on the Emotionality of Adolescents' COVID-19 Memory Narratives." *Applied Cognitive Psychology*.

Berk, L. E., and A. Winsler. 1995. *Scaffolding Children's Learning: Vygotsky and Early Childhood Education. NAEYC Research into Practice Series*. Vol. 7. National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Blasbalg, U., I. Hershkowitz, M. E. Lamb, and Y. Karni-Visel. 2021. "Adherence to the Revised NICHD Protocol Recommendations for Conducting Repeated Supportive Interviews Is Associated With the Likelihood That Children Will Allege Abuse." *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 27, no. 2: 209–220. https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000295.

Booker, J. A., C. L. Smith, M. A. Bell, and J. C. Dunsmore. in press. "Maternal Discourse Profiles in Mother-Child Reminiscing: Implications for Children's Cognitive and Emotional Development." *Applied Cognitive Psychology*.

Brown, D. A., M. E. Lamb, C. Lewis, M. E. Pipe, Y. Orbach, and M. Wolfman. 2013. "The NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol: An Analogue Study." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied* 19, no. 4: 367–382. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035143.

Brubacher, S. P., and D. A. Brown. 2026. "Use of Ground Rules in Interviews With Children." In *Handbook on Child Witnesses: Improving Psychological Science and Legal Practice*, edited by G. S. Goodman, T. D. Lyon, S. D. Hobbs, and R. Enriquez, 181–202. APA.

Brubacher, S. P., D. A. Poole, and J. J. Dickinson. 2015. "The Use of Ground Rules in Investigative Interviews With Children: A Synthesis and Call for Research." *Developmental Review* 36: 15–33. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2015.01.001.

Brubacher, S. P., and M. B. Powell. 2024. "Overview of Best Practices in Interviewing Children." In *International Handbook of Investigative Interviewing and Interrogation*, edited by D. Walsh, R. Bull, and I. Areh, 397–411. Routledge.

Brubacher, S. P., K. P. Roberts, and M. Powell. 2011. "Effects of Practicing Episodic Versus Scripted Recall on Children's Subsequent Narratives of a Repeated Event." *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 17, no. 2: 286–314. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022793.

Brubacher, S. P., L. Timms, M. Powell, and M. Bearman. 2019. ""She Wanted to Know the Full Story": Children's Perceptions of Open Versus Closed Questions." *Child Maltreatment* 24, no. 2: 222–231. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559518821730.

Bühler-Wassmann, A. C., A. Villaneuva, D. I. Acosta, M. A. Callanan, G. Melzi, and C. A. Haden. in press. "Narrating Science, Shaping Selves: Oral Stories Latine Caregivers Share With Their Preschoolers as Pathways to Science Learning and Identity." *Applied Cognitive Psychology*.

Clarke-Stewart, A., and R. Beck. 1999. "Maternal Scaffolding and Children's Narrative Retelling of a Movie." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 3: 409–434. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006(99)00018-6.

Danby, M. C., S. P. Brubacher, S. J. Sharman, and M. B. Powell. 2015. "The Effects of Practice on Children's Ability to Apply Ground Rules in a Narrative Interview." *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 33, no. 4: 446–458. https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2194.

Danby, M. C., S. P. Brubacher, S. J. Sharman, and M. B. Powell. 2017. "The Effects of One Versus Two Episodically Oriented Practice Narratives on Children's Reports of a Repeated Event." *Legal and Criminological Psychology* 22, no. 2: 442–454. https://doi.org/10.1111/lcrp.12110.

De Rivera, C., L. Girolametto, J. Greenberg, and E. Weitzman. 2005. "Children's Responses to Educators' Questions in Day Care Play Groups." *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 14, no. 1: 14–26. https://doi.org/10.1044/1058-0360(2005/004).

Denne, E., S. Brubacher, K. Simpson, D. Adams, N. Dargue, and M. Powell. 2024. "Examining Autistic and Non-Autistic Children's Productivity in Response to Subtypes of Open-Ended Prompts." *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice* 7, no. 2: 257–266. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-023-00186-5.

Dunn, D. M. 2018. *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test–Fifth Edition*. Pearson.

Feltis, B. B., M. B. Powell, P. C. Snow, and C. H. Hughes-Scholes. 2010. "An Examination of the Association Between Interviewer Question Type and Story-Grammar Detail in Child Witness Interviews About Abuse." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 34, no. 6: 407–413. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2009.09.019.

Fivush, R. 1991. "The Social Construction of Personal Narratives." *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 37, no. 1: 59–81. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23087339.

Fivush, R., and F. A. Fromhoff. 1988. "Style and Structure in Mother–Child Conversations About the Past." *Discourse Processes* 11: 337–355. https://doi.org/10.1080/01638538809544707.

Fivush, R., C. A. Haden, and E. Reese. 2006. "Elaborating on Elaborations: Role of Maternal Reminiscing Style in Cognitive and Socioemotional Development." *Child Development* 77, no. 6: 1568–1588. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2006.00960.x.

Fivush, R., A. Hazzard, J. McDermott Sales, D. Sarfati, and T. Brown. 2003. "Creating Coherence Out of Chaos? Children's Narratives of Emotionally Positive and Negative Events." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 17, no. 1: 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.854.

Fivush, R., J. McDermott Sales, and J. G. Bohanek. 2008. "Meaning Making in Mothers' and Children's Narratives of Emotional Events." *Memory* 16, no. 6: 579–594. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210802150681.

Fivush, R., and A. Vasudeva. 2002. "Remembering to Relate: Socioemotional Correlates of Mother-Child Reminiscing." *Journal of Cognition and Development* 3, no. 1: 73–90. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327647JCD0301_5.

Foster, I., V. Talwar, and A. Crossman. 2023. "The Role of Rapport in Eliciting Children's Truthful Reports." *Applied Developmental Science* 27, no. 3: 221–237. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2022.2058507.

Haden, C. A., R. A. Haine, and R. Fivush. 1997. "Developing Narrative Structure in Parent–Child Reminiscing Across the Preschool Years." *Developmental Psychology* 33, no. 2: 295–307. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.33.2.295.

Hamel, E., Y. Joo, S. Y. Hong, and A. Burton. 2021. "Teacher Questioning Practices in Early Childhood Science Activities." *Early Childhood*

10990720, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.70263 by University Of Technology Sydney, Wiley Online Library on [08/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Education Journal 49, no. 3: 375–384. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01075-z.

Harris, P. L., and J. Schroeder. 2012. "What the Berenstain Bears Can Tell Us About School Readiness: Maternal Story Grammar Style and Preschool Narrative Recall." *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 10, no. 2: 176–195. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X11430072.

Hershkowitz, I. 2009. "Socioemotional Factors in Child Abuse Investigations." *Child Maltreatment* 14, no. 2: 172–181. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559508326224.

Hershkowitz, I. 2011. "Rapport Building in Investigative Interviews of Children." In *Children's Testimony: A Handbook of Psychological Research and Forensic Practice*, edited by M. E. Lamb, D. J. La Rooy, L. C. Malloy, and C. Katz, 109–128. Wiley.

Hill, K. A., S. S. Cohen, I. R. Olson, and N. S. Newcombe. 2025. "The Role of Narrative Structure in Scaffolding Children's Recall." *Journal of Cognition and Development*: 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/15248372.2025.2571554.

Holder, R., S. Brubacher, M. Powell, et al. 2025. *'Hear Our Voices': A Guide to Aboriginal-Led Child Safety Practices*. Centre for Investigative Interviewing, Griffith University. https://doi.org/10.25904/1912/5794.

Kontogianni, F., L. Hope, P. J. Taylor, A. Vrij, and F. Gabbert. 2020. ""Tell Me More About This...": An Examination of the Efficacy of Follow-Up Open Questions Following an Initial Account." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 34, no. 5: 972–983. https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.3675.

Kulkofsky, S., Q. Wang, and S. J. Ceci. 2008. "Do Better Stories Make Better Memories? Narrative Quality and Memory Accuracy in Preschool Children." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 22, no. 1: 21–38. https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1326.

Lamb, M. E., D. A. Brown, I. Hershkowitz, Y. Orbach, and P. W. Esplin. 2018. *Tell Me What Happened: Questioning Children About Abuse*. John Wiley & Sons.

Lavoie, J., J. Wyman, A. M. Crossman, and V. Talwar. 2021. "Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Two Interviewing Practices on Children's Disclosures of Sensitive Information: Rapport Practices and Question Type." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 113: 104930. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.104930.

Lawson, M., B. Jaeger, E. McManus, R. Speidel, and K. Valentino. 2021. "Maternal Reminiscing Is Associated With Preschoolers' Reports of Maltreatment During Forensic Interviews." *Child Maltreatment* 26, no. 1: 105–114. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559520925180.

Lyon, T. D., L. Wandrey, E. C. Ahern, R. Licht, M. P. Y. Sim, and J. A. Quas. 2014. "Eliciting Maltreated and Nonmaltreated Children's Transgression Disclosures: Narrative Practice Rapport Building and a Putative Confession." *Child Development* 85, no. 4: 1756–1769. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12223.

Malloy, L. C., and S. N. Stolzenberg. 2019. "Questioning Kids: Applying the Lessons From Developmentally-Sensitive Investigative Interviewing to the Research Context." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines* 60, no. 3: 325–327. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13005.

Ministry of Justice. 2022. *Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance on Interviewing Victims and Witnesses, and Guidance on Using Special Measures*. Home Office.

National Children's Advocacy Center. 2019. "National Children's Advocacy Center's Child Forensic Interview structure." https://www.nationalcac.org/wpcontent/uploads/2019/02/NCAC_CFIS_Feb-2019.pdf.

Newman, R. M., and K. K. McGregor. 2006. "Teachers and Laypersons Discern Quality Differences Between Narratives Produced by Children With or Without SLI." *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 49, no. 5: 1022–1036. https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388(2006/073).

Paul, R. 2001. *Language Disorders From Infancy Through Adolescence. Assessment and Intervention*. 2nd ed. Miss Mosby.

Peterson, C., and A. McCabe. 1994. "A Social Interactionist Account of Developing Decontextualized Narrative Skill." *Developmental Psychology* 30: 937–948. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.30.6.937.

Powell, M. B., and S. P. Brubacher. 2020. "The Origin, Experimental Basis, and Application of the Standard Interview Method: An Information-Gathering Framework." *Australian Psychologist* 55, no. 6: 645–659.

Powell, M. B., and P. C. Snow. 2007. "Guide to Questioning Children During the Free-Narrative Phase of an Investigative Interview." *Australian Psychologist* 42, no. 1: 57–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/00050060600976032.

Reese, E., A. Alias, and J. Parry. in press. "Origins of Life Stories in Mid-Adolescence." *Applied Cognitive Psychology*.

Reese, E., and A. Brown. 2000. "Reminiscing and Recounting in the Preschool Years." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 14, no. 1: 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-0720(200001)14:1<1::AID-ACP625>3.0.CO;2-G.

Reese, E., and R. Fivush. 1993. "Parental Styles of Talking About the Past." *Developmental Psychology* 29, no. 3: 596–606. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.29.3.596.

Reese, E., C. A. Haden, and R. Fivush. 1993. "Mother-Child Conversations About the Past: Relationships of Style and Memory Over Time." *Cognitive Development* 8, no. 4: 403–430. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2014(05)80002-4.

Reese, E., D. Leyva, A. Sparks, and W. Grolnick. 2010. "Maternal Elaborative Reminiscing Increases Low-Income Children's Narrative Skills Relative to Dialogic Reading." *Early Education and Development* 21, no. 3: 318–342. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2010.481552.

Reese, E., and R. Newcombe. 2007. "Training Mothers in Elaborative Reminiscing Enhances Children's Autobiographical Memory and Narrative." *Child Development* 78, no. 4: 1153–1170. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2007.01058.x.

Richardson, J. T. 2011. "Eta Squared and Partial Eta Squared as Measures of Effect Size in Educational Research." *Educational Research Review* 6, no. 2: 135–147. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2010.12.001.

Roberts, K. P., S. P. Brubacher, M. B. Powell, and H. L. Price. 2011. "Practice Narratives." In *Children's Testimony: A Handbook of Psychological Research and Forensic Practice*, edited by M. E. Lamb, D. J. La Rooy, L. C. Malloy, and C. Katz, 129–145. Wiley.

Roberts, K. P., M. E. Lamb, and K. J. Sternberg. 2004. "The Effects of Rapport-Building Style on Children's Reports of a Staged Event." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 18, no. 2: 189–202. https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.957.

Sahin-Acar, B., B. Bahtiyar-Saygan, C. Alsancak-Akbulut, and E. Sagel-Cetiner. 2019. "Reunion After a Long Day: Mother-Child Dyads' Unshared Memory Conversations." *Cognitive Development* 52: 100822. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogdev.2019.100822.

Saywitz, K. J., R. E. Geiselman, and G. K. Bornstein. 1992. "Effects of Cognitive Interviewing and Practice on Children's Recall Performance." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 77, no. 5: 744–756. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.77.5.744.

Snow, P. C., and M. B. Powell. 2005. "What's the Story? An Exploration of Narrative Language Abilities in Male Juvenile Offenders." *Psychology, Crime & Law* 11, no. 3: 239–253. https://doi.org/10.1080/10683160420000209323.

Snow, P. C., M. B. Powell, and R. Murfett. 2009. "Getting the Story From Child Witnesses: Exploring the Application of a Story Grammar Framework." *Psychology, Crime & Law* 15, no. 6: 555–568. https://doi.org/10.1080/10683160802409347.

10990720, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.70263 by University Of Technology Sydney, Wiley Online Library on [08/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Snow, P. C., M. Woodward, M. Mathis, and M. B. Powell. 2016. "Language Functioning, Mental Health and Alexithymia in Incarcerated Young Offenders." *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 18, no. 1: 20–31. https://doi.org/10.3109/17549507.2015.1081291.

Stein, N., and C. Glenn. 1979. "An Analysis of Story Comprehension in Elementary School Children." In *New Directions in Discourse Processing*, edited by R. Freedle, 53–120. Ablex.

Sternberg, K. J., M. E. Lamb, I. Hershkowitz, et al. 1997. "Effects of Introductory Style on Children's Abilities to Describe Experiences of Sexual Abuse." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 21, no. 11: 1133–1146. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134(97)00071-9.

Trabasso, T., and M. Nickels. 1992. "The Development of Goal Plans of Action in the Narration of a Picture Story." *Discourse Processes* 15, no. 3: 249–275. https://doi.org/10.1080/01638539209544812.

Vanaken, L., P. Bijttebier, R. Fivush, and D. Hermans. 2022. "Narrative Coherence Predicts Emotional Well-Being During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Two-Year Longitudinal Study." *Cognition and Emotion* 36, no. 1: 70–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2021.1902283.

Vroom, J. R., M. C. Danby, and S. J. Sharman. 2025. "A Systematic Mapping Review of the Literature Examining Pre-Substantive Rapport-Building Techniques in Investigative Interviews With Children." *Psychology, Crime & Law* 1–27: 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2025.2553302.

Waters, T. E., C. Camia, C. R. Facompré, and R. Fivush. 2019. "A Meta-Analytic Examination of Maternal Reminiscing Style: Elaboration, Gender, and Children's Cognitive Development." *Psychological Bulletin* 145, no. 11: 1082–1102. https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000211.

Westby, C., and B. Culatta. 2016. "Telling Tales: Personal Event Narratives and Life Stories." *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools* 47, no. 4: 260–282. https://doi.org/10.1044/2016_LSHSS-15-007.

Westcott, H. L., and S. Kynan. 2004. "The Application of a 'Story-Telling' Framework to Investigative Interviews for Suspected Child Sexual Abuse." *Legal and Criminological Psychology* 9, no. 1: 37–56.

Westerveld, M. F., R. Lyons, N. W. Nelson, et al. 2022. "Global TALES Feasibility Study: Personal Narratives in 10-Year-Old Children Around the World." *PLoS One* 17, no. 8: e0273114. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0273114.

Whiting, B. F., and H. L. Price. 2017. "Practice Narratives Enhance Children's Memory Reports." *Psychology, Crime & Law* 23, no. 8: 730–747. https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2017.1324031.

Yi, M., and M. E. Lamb. 2018. "The Effects of Narrative Practice on Children's Testimony and Disclosure of Secrets." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 32, no. 3: 326–336. https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.3385.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Data S1:** Supporting Information. **Data S2:** Supporting Information.

10990720, 2026, 4, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.70263 by University Of Technology Sydney, Wiley Online Library on [08/10/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License