NARRATIVE INSTRUCTION IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

An Observation Study

ABSTRACT

This study examined the amount and types of narrative instruction (i.e., story comprehension, oral storytelling, and story writing instruction) that general education English language arts teachers provide to students in grades 1 through 4. The research team conducted 121 approximately 30-minute classroom observations. Educators were asked to teach a lesson focused on narrative comprehension or production (i.e., on "understanding literary text or creating stories"). The amount and type of story instruction provided to students varied across classrooms. Forty-four percent of observed minutes were devoted to story comprehension; 10% of minutes addressed story writing. Teachers spent no time working with students on oral storytelling. Findings suggest that story production may not be an instructional focus in many primary-grade classrooms. In addition, from both a macrostructure and a microstructure standpoint, typical narrative instruction may omit elements of narrative language instruction that are associated with improved narrative comprehension, oral storytelling, and writing outcomes.

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NARRATIVE proficiency—that is, the ability to understand and create stories—is closely associated with a variety of literacy and other academic skills. Early narrative language skill predicts later oral language (e.g., Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Murphy et al., 2016), reading comprehension (e.g., Catts et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2004; Kendeou et al., 2009; Wellman et al., 2011), and writing achievement (e.g., Fey et al., 2004; Olinghouse & Leaird, 2009). Fazio et al. (1996) determined that, from among a set of three language and memory measures (story retelling, invented morpheme learning, and rote counting), it was students' kindergarten narrative proficiency as measured by story retelling that was the best predictor of their overall academic performance in grade 2.

The importance of narrative instruction is reflected across the reading, speaking, and writing strands of elementary-grade state standards (e.g., Common Core State Standards [CCSS]; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Reading standards expect grade 1 students to retell stories (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.2), including describing characters, settings, and major events (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.3). By grades 3 and 4, story comprehension should reflect an understanding of the motivations and feelings of characters and how they relate to story events (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.3, 4.3). The CCSS for speaking and listening expect primary-grade students to "tell a story" of their own that includes appropriate facts and descriptive details (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.4). By grade 4, they are expected to "tell a story . . . in an organized manner," using specific story grammar and story language elements (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.4).

The grade 1 writing standards call for students to write sequenced narratives that "include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure" (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.3). Grade 4 students are expected to write narratives using more sophisticated story grammar and story language, including dialogue, character internal response, a "variety of transitional words and phrases to manage the sequence of events," and a "conclusion that follows from the narrated events" (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3).

For educators aiming to help students meet these standards and prevent the academic underachievement associated with early narrative language difficulties, there is considerable research that identifies effective instructional practices for improving narrative proficiency (e.g., Foorman et al., 2016; Petersen, 2011; Shanahan et al., 2010). Yet little or no observation research exists examining the degree to which these instructional approaches are implemented in general education classroom settings. This study sought to describe the amount, type, and quality of story comprehension, oral storytelling, and story writing instruction provided to students in grade 1–4 general education classrooms. We aimed to assess the extent to which observed practices were aligned with research evidence concerning effective instruction targeting story structure and story language.

Narrative Macrostructure and Narrative Microstructure

Conceptually, narratives include elements of both *macrostructure* (i.e., story grammar propositions encompassing the global organization of story elements) and *microstructure* (i.e., story language, including local language forms used to convey

information such as the way temporal and causal relations between events are expressed). Stein and Glenn (1979) defined narrative macrostructure as a setting (i.e., the time or place that the story occurred) plus one or more episodes, with each episode including an initiating event (i.e., an incident that motivates actions by the main character), a goal-directed action known as an attempt, and a consequence that is related to the initiating event and actions. Other theorists (e.g., Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Thorndyke, 1977) have specified slightly different elements of narrative macrostructure. Nevertheless, story grammar categories targeted during narrative language instruction typically include some combination of the following: character, setting (i.e., time and place), initiating event (e.g., problem, goal), character internal response, plan, attempt (i.e., action in response to the initiating event or plan), complication (i.e., event that hinders the action), consequence (i.e., outcome of the action), and resolution.

Narrative microstructure refers to the local language forms that hold a story together. Cohesive devices include coordinating and subordinating conjunctions (e.g., and, but, yet, so), adverbs (e.g., suddenly, again), elaborated noun phrases (e.g., the frail old woman), and metalinguistic verbs that introduce acts of thinking or speaking (e.g., yelled, whispered, pleaded, wondered; Gillam et al., 2017). The linguistic microstructure of stories confers narrative cohesion by representing characters and situations with precision and also by specifying temporal, causal, and referential relationships.

Effective Narrative Language Instruction

A number of systematic reviews offer insight regarding effective practices for improving story comprehension, oral storytelling, and story writing proficiency in the elementary grades. Within each domain, instructional practices typically target either narrative macrostructure or narrative microstructure.

Story Comprehension

Teaching students to identify elements of story macrostructure (i.e., story grammar) using story maps or other graphic organizers has long been considered an evidence-based approach to teaching story comprehension for both typically developing students (e.g., Baumann & Bergeron, 1993; Reutzel, 1985) and students with or at risk for reading disabilities (e.g., Stetter & Hughes, 2010). In a What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) practice guide that provides evidence-based suggestions for improving reading comprehension for all students in the primary grades, Shanahan et al. (2010) recommended that educators teach students to identify and connect story elements in narrative texts using story maps or other graphic organizers. These recommendations echo guidance published in reports produced by the National Reading Panel (2000) and RAND (2002). In a separate WWC practice guide focused on developing foundational reading skills in diverse populations of primary-grade students, Foorman et al. (2016) also endorsed story grammar instruction as an effective instructional practice. In addition, Foorman and colleagues cited evidence that instruction targeting narrative microstructure is associated with improvements in early reading skills for primary-grade students. They specifically referred to the benefits of teaching

students linguistic and grammatical structures that (*a*) organize information in a logical sequence, (*b*) establish relations between story elements, and (*c*) provide detail about settings, characters, and events (e.g., elaborated noun phrases, subordinating/coordinating conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs).

Oral Storytelling

There is a dearth of research investigating the effects of oral storytelling instruction on academic outcomes for elementary-grade students receiving instruction in general education classrooms. Nevertheless, elementary-grade students are frequently asked to create and perform narratives (Herbein et al., 2018; Schick & Melzi, 2010), and a meta-analysis conducted by Pesco and Gagné (2017) indicated that instruction in oral storytelling has the potential to improve oral storytelling at least for preschool and kindergarten-age students served in general education settings. Gillam et al. (2014) investigated the effects of narrative and vocabulary instruction provided by a speech-language pathologist to students in a general education classroom setting. Students who received narrative and vocabulary instruction made clinically significant improvements on narrative and vocabulary measures whereas children in the comparison classroom did not.

There is a large body of research demonstrating that instruction in oral storytelling is effective in improving storytelling outcomes for students with or at risk for language impairments. Petersen (2011) conducted a synthesis of research examining the effects of narrative language instruction that included an oral production component on narrative language outcomes for children who fit this profile. This synthesis provides further empirical support for teaching narrative macrostructure using story grammar instruction. Small-group oral storytelling instruction focused on story grammar and episodic structure was associated with narrative language gains (e.g., Klecan-Aker et al., 1997; Petersen et al., 2008, 2010). Eight of the nine studies meeting the inclusion criteria for Petersen's synthesis measured narrative macrostructure outcomes, with seven of these reporting effects in favor of treatment (effect size range: 0.73–1.57).

Six of the studies included in Petersen's (2011) systematic review targeted narrative microstructure instead of or in addition to targeting narrative macrostructure. Petersen reported that four of these studies found moderate to large effect sizes in favor of narrative microstructure instruction, whereas two studies did not show positive effects. In studies that did report moderate to large effect sizes in favor of treatment, interventions included explicit instruction in the use of language that conveyed temporal and/or causal relations (e.g., Hayward & Schneider, 2000; Petersen et al., 2008, 2010).

In addition to repeated narrative retelling and generation, a few other narrative instructional practices were associated with improved outcomes across studies (Petersen, 2011): (*a*) use of single images to elicit narratives, (*b*) use of wordless picture books to elicit narratives, (*c*) drawing representative pictures, (*d*) use of icons or cue cards to represent story grammar elements, and (*e*) role-playing story narratives. The sentence-level grammatical and linguistic structures taught varied substantially across studies. However, a number of studies associated with improved outcomes employed (*a*) explicit instruction in language used to convey temporal and causal relations, and (*b*) vertical structuring and expansion techniques that encouraged students to employ longer, more syntactically sophisticated sentences in their narratives.

In a more recently published systematic review that was again focused on the effects of oral storytelling instruction on outcomes for students with or at risk for language disorders, Nicolopoulou and Trapp (2018) similarly determined that oral storytelling instruction has the potential to improve narrative language, with gains being most evident in the context of narrative macrostructure. Nicolopoulou and Trapp concurred with Petersen (2011) that there was not clear evidence as to which microstructural elements should be promoted during instruction. However, the review identified several linguistic and grammatical practices (e.g., temporal and causal language, noun phrases, subordinate clauses, and dialogue) that were components of effective approaches to narrative instruction.

Story Writing

Given the large contribution of oral language to writing (Kim & Schatschneider, 2017), it is not surprising that effective practices for developing narrative writing proficiency reflect previously discussed practices for developing narrative comprehension and oral storytelling. In a meta-analysis of research on writing instruction for students in the elementary grades (i.e., students served in both general and special education settings), Graham et al. (2012) recommended providing macrostructure instruction (i.e., narrative text structure instruction) as a way of improving narrative writing. Each of the nine text-structure studies included in their meta-analysis was associated with positive effects in favor of the treatment condition (effect size range: 0.13–0.94). Five of these studies investigated the effects of story grammar instruction during narrative writing (e.g., Fitzgerald & Teasley, 1986; Gambrell & Chasen, 1991; Harris & Graham, 1992). Graham et al. (2012) also determined that strategy instruction targeting narrative macrostructure was associated with improved writing (e.g., self-regulated strategy development; Harris & Graham, 1992).

There were no microstructure-focused studies that met criteria for inclusion in the Graham et al. (2012) meta-analysis. However, in three other systematic reviews of studies investigating the effects of writing instruction delivered to older students served in general and special education contexts, microstructure-focused writing instruction was associated with positive effects on writing achievement. For example, Hillocks (1986) reported a mean effect size of 0.35 for sentence-combining instruction with students in grade 3 through college; Graham and Perin (2007) calculated a weighted mean effect size of 0.50 for sentence-combining instruction with students in grades 4–12; and Andrews et al. (2006) reported moderate to large effect sizes for the medium- or high-quality sentence-combining instruction studies with participants aged 5–16 years. During sentence-combining instruction, students were taught to use connectives (e.g., but, after, as soon as, when, where, so that, because) and other cohesive devices (e.g., pronouns) to construct more syntactically sophisticated sentences.

Existing Observation Studies

Previous observation studies have identified the types, amount, and/or quality of reading instruction, including particular components of reading instruction (e.g.,

phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension instruction), provided to elementary school students in general education settings. For example, Duke (2000) observed 20 first-grade classrooms from very low- and very high-socioeconomic status (SES) districts, conducting four full-day observations per classroom during which she coded information about classroom libraries, classroom environmental print, and print-related activities. Students in high-SES districts had significantly more print materials in classroom libraries, more opportunities to interact with classroom environmental print, more exposure to extended text, more opportunities to choose reading and writing topics, and more opportunities to write compositions for audiences beyond the teacher.

Foorman et al. (2006) observed literacy instruction in 107 first- and second-grade classrooms in 17 high-poverty schools, conducting an average of four observations per classroom. Authors coded the instructional content of lessons using 20 categories: oral language, grammar, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, print awareness, letter knowledge, alphabetic instruction, word work (i.e., decoding and word recognition), structural analysis of morphological units, previewing a text before reading, reading or being read connected text, reading comprehension, written composition, students reading their own writing, spelling instruction, spelling in the context of reading instruction, giving directions and preparing for instruction, nonreading activities, feedback (corrective, praise, and punitive), and uncodable. They also rated teachers' overall effectiveness. There was a tendency for teachers rated high in effectiveness to allocate instructional time in ways that maximized word-reading outcomes. Specifically, highly effective first-grade teachers positively affected word attack outcomes by spending more time in phonemic awareness and alphabetic activities compared with noninstructional activities. Effective teachers positively affected letter-word identification outcomes by not engaging in grammar, mechanics, and spelling instruction.

Kent et al. (2017) observed reading instruction provided in 21 general education fourth-grade classrooms in two states, conducting two observations per classroom. They coded for minutes of instruction devoted to phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, fluency, text reading, vocabulary, comprehension, "other academic" instruction, and noninstructional time. Reading comprehension and vocabulary were the most prevalent foci of instruction (occupying 40% and 13% of instructional minutes observed, respectively), with limited time allocated to word-level skills (e.g., passage reading fluency, decoding). Patterns of time allocation to these instructional components did not significantly predict end-of-year student achievement.

Silverman et al. (2014) observed vocabulary instruction as well as reading comprehension instruction in upper elementary-grade classrooms. They determined that the most prevalent types of vocabulary instruction were (a) activities that encouraged "application across contexts" of new vocabulary learning and (b) provision of definitions. Only instruction related to definitions, word relations, and morphosyntax was associated with positive change in vocabulary knowledge. Inferential comprehension instruction was observed less frequently than literal comprehension instruction, but it was associated with positive change in reading comprehension skill whereas literal comprehension instruction was associated with negative change.

There have been fewer studies documenting the nature and types of writing instruction provided by teachers in general education classrooms. Kim et al. (2013)

coded for writing quality in their study investigating the relations between child factors, teacher instructional quality, and student writing, with results suggesting that teacher responsiveness was related to writing quality. However, the authors collected little information about the nature and types of writing instruction provided to students. Puranik et al. (2014) observed writing instruction in kindergarten classrooms and determined that the amount of time for writing instruction and practice during the English language arts block averaged 6.1 minutes in the fall and 10.4 minutes in the spring. Handwriting instruction was the most prevalent writing activity, averaging about a minute per observation in the fall and 2 minutes in the spring.

Coker et al. (2016) observed writing instruction in first-grade classrooms. Spelling was the most frequently observed activity, with 19.9% of observed minutes devoted to writing instruction focused on spelling. When writing foci were combined into broader categories, "skills" instruction (spelling, grammar, handwriting, punctuation/capitalization, and keyboarding) was the most frequent focus (occurring during 32% of writing instruction blocks); instruction focused on "composition" (connected text-writing with informative or narrative storytelling goals), "process" (consisting of process writing, revising, and editing), and "sharing" (consisting of sharing by students and teachers) were less frequent. Writing instruction was usually taught within a whole-class grouping structure.

Further information about the nature of writing instruction in elementary classrooms can be gleaned from survey research. Richards et al. (2012) conducted a survey of general education teachers in first-, third-, and fifth-grade classrooms to examine the frequency of writing instructional activities and the genres composed most frequently by students in these classrooms. They reported tremendous variability in the frequency with which teachers implemented all types of writing activities. Few activities occurred with high frequency (i.e., at least two times per week). Narrative writing occurred more frequently than expository writing, although expository writing assignments increased in frequency as grade level increased. In another survey of primary-grade writing teachers conducted by Cutler and Graham (2008), the median time teachers reported devoting to writing each day was 20 minutes. Narrative writing was again more common than expository writing, and students spent less time writing connected text or learning about process writing strategies than they did learning basic writing skills (e.g., handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization). Teachers reported teaching writing in a whole-class setting most of the time, with small group (23%) and one-on-one instruction (24%) occurring less frequently.

The Present Study

Narrative proficiency in the elementary grades is an important contributor to later school success (e.g., Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Catts et al., 2015; Fey et al., 2004), and much is already known about effective instructional practices for improving narrative outcomes (e.g., Foorman et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2012; Nicolopoulou & Trapp, 2018; Petersen, 2011; Shanahan et al., 2010). Yet no previous research has documented the nature of the narrative instruction imparted by general education teachers in schools. Therefore we conducted a systematic observation study to improve our understanding of general education teachers' provision of narrative

instruction to students in grades 1–4. The primary research question we addressed was as follows: What is the amount, type, and quality of narrative instruction that general education teachers provide in grades 1–4 when prompted to teach a typical narrative lesson? We were also interested in investigating the degree to which teachers' practices aligned with approaches to teaching narrative comprehension, oral storytelling, and writing found to be effective in previous research. Finally, consistent with several observation studies cited above, we were interested in determining the degree to which narrative instruction was provided to students within whole-class, small-group, one-on-one, peer pairing, or independent-work formats. In general, observation studies of reading, writing, and oral language instruction find that partner and small-group learning are significantly related to improvement in academic outcomes for students in both general and special education classroom settings (Elbaum et al., 2000; Lou et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 1999; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007).

This study has the potential to provide stakeholders focused on policy, educator preparation, and professional development with important information about how research-based recommendations related to narrative language instruction are implemented in typical classrooms. Results may also inform future narrative language intervention research.

Method

Study Context

This observation study was conducted in the context of a larger randomized controlled trial (RCT) of a small-group, narrative language instructional intervention (Supporting Knowledge in Language and Literacy [SKILL], authored by Gillam and Gillam [2016]). The SKILL program evaluated in the RCT did not address core English language arts narrative language instruction, and no training or materials were provided to educators at the study schools. The research team was interested in measuring the amount, type, and quality of narrative instruction that participating students received in their English language arts classrooms; therefore, we examined instruction provided by general education teachers in grades 1 through 4 at participating campuses during times when they indicated they would be teaching lessons that focused on understanding literary text or creating stories. At least one student in each of the general education classrooms where we observed was a participant in the SKILL RCT; that said, there were other students in each classroom who were not participants in the RCT. Importantly, the teachers who participated in this observation study did not receive SKILL training or materials, nor were they provided any information about how to provide effective narrative instruction.

Setting

The study was conducted at (*a*) one urban public elementary school and one urban public charter school in the southwestern United States and (*b*) two rural public elementary schools and one rural, university-affiliated public charter school in the Rocky Mountain West. Table 1 represents demographic information about participating schools. At the public elementary school in the southwestern United States,

Table 1. School Information

Schools	Enrollment	SPED (%)	Economic Disadvantage (%)	Ethnicity (%)			LEP (%)
				Black (Non-Hispanic)	Hispanic	White (Non-Hispanic)	
Southwestern public	595	12.3	94.8	1.3	94.1	3.4	17.6
Southwestern public charter	219	9.5	87.2	17.8	76.3	5.5	37.0
Rocky Mountain public	518	19.1	53.9	0	20.1	75.5	17.2
Rocky Mountain public	673	16.9	43.8	0	17.8	76.9	13.4
Rocky Mountain public charter	358	16.5	28.2	1.4	9.2	80.2	1.4

Note.—SPED = special education; LEP = limited English proficient.

teachers were newly implementing the *Reading Wonders* (McGraw-Hill Education, 2014) core curriculum, which they supplemented with their own teacher-developed lessons. At the public schools in the Rocky Mountain West, educators drew from a number of curricula including *Saxon Phonics* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), *Step Up to Writing* (Auman, 2003), and *Reading Street* (Pearson, 2013). At both charter schools, teachers used a variety of texts and tools to provide instruction in alignment with literacy scope and sequence maps.

Participants

Forty-one English language arts teachers from two school districts in the southwestern United States and one school district in the Rocky Mountain West participated in the study: 7 grade 1 teachers, 13 grade 2 teachers, 10 grade 3 teachers, and 11 grade 4 teachers. Teachers averaged 12.0 years of experience teaching elementary-level English language arts (range: 1–40 years; SD = 10.2 years). Five out of the 41 teachers (12.2%) held reading endorsements, and 10 of the 41 (24.4%) had earned master's degrees.

The ICE-SKILL Observation Tool

Researchers developed an observation tool that was adapted from the Instructional Content Emphasis (ICE) observation form (Edmonds & Briggs, 2003) that has been used to measure the nature and content of English language arts instruction in numerous observation studies over the last decade and a half (e.g., Ciullo et al., 2016; Donne & Zigmond, 2008; Hairrell et al., 2011; Harn et al., 2011; Kent et al., 2017; McKenna & Ciullo, 2016; Nelson et al., 2015; Swanson & Vaughn, 2010; Swanson et al., 2012; Vadasy & Sanders, 2008, 2010, 2012; Wanzek, 2014; Wanzek et al., 2017). Our adapted instrument, the ICE-SKILL observation tool, focuses specifically on measuring aspects of story comprehension, oral storytelling, and/or story writing instruction.

The data yielded by ICE-SKILL include (*a*) amount of time allocated for each main instructional domain (e.g., story comprehension, oral language storytelling, story writing); (*b*) the presence or absence of story grammar (i.e., macrostructure) and/or story language (i.e., microstructure) instruction during each instructional

domain; (c) specific story grammar and/or story language foci; (d) student grouping patterns; (e) materials utilized; (f) global rating scales of teacher instructional quality and behavior management; and (g) a global rating scale of student engagement. Instructional categories and subcategories were derived from national and state standards and research on best practices in narrative language instruction (Foorman et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2012; Nicolopoulou & Trapp, 2018; Petersen, 2011; Shanahan et al., 2010). The research team engaged in an iterative process to develop the final instrument. We piloted initial versions of the code sheet and code book using publicly available videos of classroom narrative language instruction, convened to discuss limitations of these initial versions of the instrument (i.e., failures to accurately capture narrative instructional practices that we observed), and engaged in several rounds of revisions based on these discussions before finalizing the code sheet and code book.

For each instructional event, the observation tool guided observers to record in Dimension A whether the main instructional category was story comprehension, oral language storytelling, story writing, "other" academic, or nonacademic (see Fig. 1 for a coding flow chart; Fig. 2 represents an excerpt from the coding manual). After indicating the main instructional category, observers used Dimension B to indicate the presence of story grammar instruction or story language instruction. Within the Dimension B category of "story grammar instruction," there were 12 Dimension C subtopics of instruction, including characters; settings (places and times); "plot"; "beginning, middle, and end"; initiating events (e.g., problems, desires, goals, the arrival of a visitor); character internal responses; plans in response to initiating
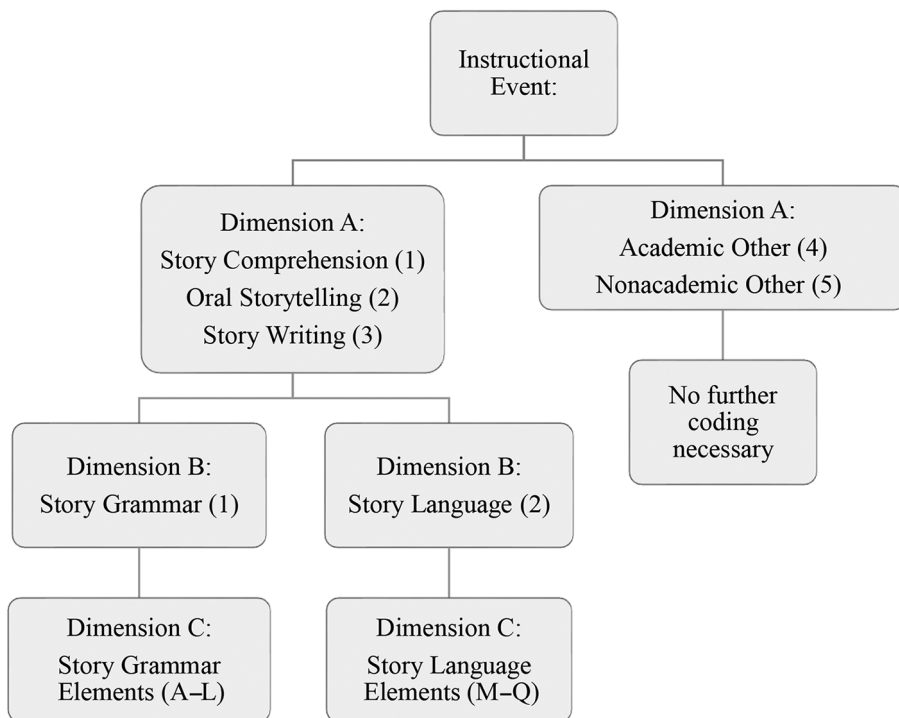

Figure 1. Coding flow chart.

Time	Brief summary of activity	DIMENSION			Grouping	Materials
		A	B	C		
6 minutes	Teacher prompts kids to talk about what they think of when they hear the word "sleepover." Teacher writes student answers on the whiteboard. Teacher has students switch to thinking from the parents' perspective. Teacher helps students think of parent thoughts related to the word "sleepover."	4	N/A	N/A	1	N/A
18 minutes	Teacher reads students the book "Voices in the Park." Before reading, teacher shares that the book is told from four different **characters'** perspectives. Teacher starts reading the book and points out the four different voices as she goes along. Teacher helps students look at pictures and points out relevant information. Teacher periodically asks students which perspective the story is currently being told from and how they know that. Teacher talks about how the characters are **feeling** and how the reader knows that. After reading, teacher summarizes and asks students questions about how the different characters felt at the end of the story. Teacher instructs students that they will get a pair of scissors and a ruler and then sit back down at their desks. They will be given a piece of paper that they must fold "hot dog" style and then wait for further instructions. Students get up to follow instructions.	1	1	A, B, F	1	2
6 minutes	Students head to their desks and teacher moves between students handing out pieces of paper.	4	N/A	N/A	5	N/A

Figure 2. Coding form example.

events; actions in response to initiating events; consequences of character actions; story complications; resolutions; and themes or morals. Within the Dimension B category of "story language instruction," there were five Dimension C categories, including teaching words or phrases that sequence story events temporally (e.g., "first," "next," "finally"); words that link story events causally (e.g., "because," "so," "since"); elaborated noun phrases (e.g., the "tiny, hunched-over lady" vs. "the lady"); linking words or phrases that show when and how events happened (i.e., subordinating conjunctions, coordinating conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs; e.g., when, while, before, after, as soon as); and character dialogue. Table 2 provides a detailed description of each Dimension A, B, and C construct.

As is shown in the descriptions of Dimensions C constructs, we attempted to capture all instances when teachers addressed story grammar and story language elements, including when the instruction was not explicit or of high quality. For instance, teachers did not need to provide explicit instruction on the meaning of the word "character" or how to identify the character in a story. Instead, we marked the story grammar element of characters as present when instruction addressed the presence of characters in a story using the word "characters" or a related term, such as "hero," "protagonist," or even "main person." Instructional quality was coded separately (see description below).

Table 2. ICE-SKILL Observation Tool Narrative Language Instruction Dimensions

Dimension	Construct	Definition/Notes
A	(1) Story comprehension	Students are engaged in the work of comprehending narrative text written or told by others.
	(2) Oral storytelling	Students are engaged in the work of producing their own oral language narratives.
	(3) Story writing	Students are engaged in the work of producing their own written language narratives.
	(4) Academic other	Students are engaged in academic instruction that does not fall into the above categories.
	(5) Nonacademic other	Any nonacademic activities (transitions, roll call)
B	(1) Addresses story grammar elements	Story grammar elements are any predictable "parts" of stories that can help students understand stories they hear/read and structure stories they tell/write.
	(2) Addresses story language	Story language is any type of language that helps structure stories and makes the narrative arc easier to follow; story language can also make stories more interesting/compelling (e.g., adding internal thought/dialogue).
C	(A) A story has characters	Characters = who or what the story is about. A character can be a person, an animal, a thing (like a toy or appliance or car that has agency in a story). This story grammar element is marked as present when instruction addresses the presence or absence of a character or characters in a story. Note, teachers must use the word "character" or a related term, such as "hero," "heroine," "protagonist," or "main person," in their discussion of a character. This story grammar element should not be marked as present when the teacher simply refers to character names found in the story.
	(B) A story has a setting	Setting = where/when the story takes place. This story grammar element is marked as present when instruction addresses the presence or absence of a story setting. Note, teachers must use the word "setting" or a synonymous term during their discussion of the story setting. This story grammar element should not be marked as present when the teacher simply refers to a place or time when a story took place; the teacher must call attention to the fact that it is the story setting. This story grammar element is considered present when the instruction addressed the setting in the story using the term "setting" or a synonymous term or discussed where/when the story takes place. For example, questions clearly related to setting, such as "Where did this story take place?" would be considered addressing setting.
	(C) A story has a plot	Plot = the main events in the story, which are presented in sequence and usually interrelated. This code can only be used if the teacher uses the word "plot" in reference to "what happened in the story." It is not enough to say, "What happened?" The teacher is required to use the word "plot."
	(D) A story has a "beginning," "middle," and "end"	This code is marked as present when teachers referred to the temporal sequence of the story using the words "beginning," "middle," and "end." Instruction that addresses "rising action, climax, and falling action" would instead be coded as "initiating event" and "resolution" (and "climax" doesn't get a code).
	(E) A story begins with an initiating event	The initiating event is something that happens in the story that gets the story going and leads the characters to take action. It is not necessary for the teacher to use the word "initiating event." The teacher may use the word "takeoff," "rising action," or "problem." Although problems can be initiating events, there are other types of initiating events (e.g., a goal/dream/wish/desire, the arrival of a visitor).

Table 2. (*Continued*)

Dimension	Construct	Definition/Notes
	(F) In a story, a character can have an internal response to events	Internal responses are a character's thoughts or feelings in response to an event in the story. This code is selected when instruction addresses a character's thoughts, feelings, or emotion in response to a story event. For instance, this code is applicable if the teacher asks, "How did the character feel?" It is not necessary for the teacher to use the words "internal response."
	(G) In stories, characters make plans to solve problems or achieve aims	Plans are things that characters express internally ("in their minds") in response to initiating events/complications. The teacher does not need to use the word "plan." However, it is necessary for the teacher to address the connection between the plan and the initiating event (rather than just mentioning the plan without connecting it to the initiating event).
	(H) In stories, characters take action/make attempts to solve problems or achieve aims	Actions are things that characters do as a way of responding to the initiating event or as a way of responding to a complication. The teacher does not need to use the word "action" or "attempt." However, it is important that the teacher makes the connection between the action and the initiating event and/or plan (rather than just mentioning the action as if it were any old thing that happened in the story).
	(I) In stories, characters' actions have consequences	Consequences are what happens as a result of the actions a character takes. The teacher does not need to use the word "consequence" specifically. The teacher may instead talk about causes and effects, results, etc. (e.g., "What did that cause the other character to say/do?").
	(J) In stories, complications get in the way of actions	Complications are things that get in the way of the actions a character takes. The teacher does not need to use the word "complication." The teacher does need to make a connection to the way in which the complication makes it harder for the character to complete an action/achieve a goal.
	(K) Stories wrap up/find resolution	The resolution of the story is the ending of the story that responds to the initiating event. It's the part of the story when the problem gets solved, the goal achieved, etc. The teacher does not need to use the word "resolution." The teacher could talk about the "outcome," "wrapping your story up," or the "landing" of a story.
	(L) Stories can have themes or morals	The theme is the story's underlying message or big idea. In other words, what critical belief about life is the author trying to convey. The teacher does not need to use the word "theme" or "moral." The teacher could use the word "big idea," "message," or something similar.
	(M) Stories are structured using temporal language to sequence story events	This language might be "in the beginning," "in the middle," and "at the end," or "first, next, last," or any variation on language that temporally sequences story events.
	(N) Stories are structured using causal language that links story events	"Teaches" includes any teacher utterance that models the use of the word "because" or "so" to express a causal relationship (e.g., "She felt x because y"). If the teacher asks a question that elicits the word "because" from a student but the teacher does not repeat the sentence in a way that uses "because" or "so" in a sentence making the causal connection, it would not be coded.
	(O) Stories include elaborated noun phrases to better describe characters, settings, and other story elements	Mostly, this will be instruction related to adding descriptive adjectives (e.g., say "the tiny, hunched-over lady" vs. "the lady") and drawing attention to these adjectives. It is not enough for the teacher to use an elaborated noun phrase; the teacher must draw attention to his or her use of the noun phrase (or an author's use of the noun phrase) to improve the story microstructure.

Table 2. (*Continued*)

Dimension	Construct	Definition/Notes
	(P) Stories include subordinating conjunctions, coordinating conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs to describe "when" and "why" story events happened	We coded for subordinating conjunctions, coordinating conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs only when they were used to explain when story events happened (e.g., when, while, before, after, as soon as) or why story events happened (e.g., to link consequences with events). Events included initiating events, character internal responses, character plans, character actions, consequences that transpired in response to character actions, complicating events, or other story events. It is not enough for the teacher simply to model using subordinating conjunctions/coordinating conjunctions/conjunctive adverbs; the teacher must draw attention to his or her use of them as a way of improving the story microstructure.
	(Q) Stories include character dialogue	Dialogue is when characters talk in stories. It is not necessary for the teacher to use the word "dialogue." The teacher may say, "What did the character say?" or teach students words that introduce dialogue, including "screamed," "whispered," etc.

Observers also noted student grouping arrangement (i.e., whole class, small group, one-on-one, peer pairing, independent, or "other") and materials used (i.e., wordless picture books, children's literature, basal readers, graphic organizers, and/or single- or multiple-scene pictures used to prompt story production) during each instructional event. Finally, observers used a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = *lowest quality* to 7 = *highest quality*) to rate the global quality of teachers' instruction, teachers' classroom management, and student engagement using the indicators listed in Figure 3. Quality and engagement indicators were adapted from the Collaborative Strategic Reading Internal Validity Checklist (e.g., Vaughn et al., 2011). Some quality and engagement indicators were also adapted from the English-Language Learner Classroom Observation Instrument (Baker et al., 2001), the Classroom Observation Checklist (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998), and Features of Effective Reading Instruction in Special Education (Klingner et al., 2010).

Procedures

Observations were scheduled at times when teachers indicated that they would be delivering a "typical lesson around understanding literary text or creating stories." Researchers conducted 121 approximately 30-minute, in-person observations of 41 general education teachers in grades 1 through 4 during the spring of 2018. For one teacher in grade 1, we were only able to conduct one observation; each of the other teachers was observed on three occasions. Teachers were assured that information collected during observations would not be shared with supervisors.

The research team hired and trained observers who had experience teaching in elementary or middle schools. Observers included four doctoral-level researchers (i.e., postdoctoral fellows, research scientists, and/or professors), four research assistants currently enrolled in a doctoral program, one master's level research assistant, and one research assistant with a bachelor's degree. All observers were provided 4 hours of training prior to the use of the observation tool, followed by several practice sessions in which observers were asked to watch a video, code the instructional events independently, and then review and discuss codes. Interobserver agreement

Instructional Quality	**Quality Indicators:** • Uses instructional time efficiently • Prepared for lesson and activities • Makes connections to prior/background knowledge • Asks clear questions and gives clear directions • Clearly explains concepts • Responds to student questions • Uses appropriate pacing, including wait time • Shows enthusiasm for content and teaching • Facilitates active engagement of students during instruction including frequent student responses (oral, written, partner, individual) • Monitors student and group performance during activities to ensure they are performing correctly • Provides frequent, positive feedback to students			
	7 = Highest	**5 = Mid-High**	**3 = Mid-Low**	**1 = Lowest**
	Demonstrates almost _all_ of the quality indicators above	Demonstrates _a majority_ of the quality indicators above	Demonstrates _less than half_ of the quality indicators above	The teacher _demonstrates almost none_ of the quality indicators above
Classroom Management	**Quality Indicators:** • Implements clear behavioral expectations • Reinforces appropriate student behavior • Redirects off-task behavior quickly and efficiently • Engages all students in the lesson • Demonstrates continuous and active supervision of students across activities • Transitions between activities without wasted time			
	7 = Highest	**5 = Mid-High**	**3 = Mid-Low**	**1 = Lowest**
	Demonstrates almost _all_ of the quality indicators above	Demonstrates _a majority_ of the quality indicators above	Demonstrates _less than half_ of the quality indicators above	The teacher _demonstrates almost none_ of the quality indicators above
Student Engagement	**Quality Indicators** • Students appear to be listening to the teacher when the teacher speaks • Students are _not_ attending much to distractions from the academic task at hand • Students are taking part actively by responding when given opportunities to respond • Students are asking questions • Students are responding to teacher prompts quickly (e.g., writing notes when prompted to do so) • If engaged in group work, students are engaging with their group members			
	7 = Highest	**5 = Mid-High**	**3 = Mid-Low**	**1 = Lowest**
	Highly engaged throughout the lesson	Engaged during _a majority_ of the lesson	Engaged during _less than half_ of the lesson	Not at all engaged during the lesson

Figure 3. Instructional quality, classroom management quality, and student engagement indicators.

was established prior to data collection. All observers watched a 25-minute video of a classroom observation and coded the observation independently. The first author, a researcher with extensive experience coding instructional observations, served as the gold standard; she established a set of correct observation codes against which other observers' codes were compared (Gwet, 2001). Percent agreement was calculated as the number of agreements divided by the total number of possible codes. Observers were required to reach 90% agreement in each category (i.e., descriptive information, Dimension A, Dimension B, Dimension C, grouping, materials, and quality) prior to conducting classroom observations. To account for chance agreement, we calculated Gwet's agreement coefficient (AC1) and found that a priori reliability remained high ($M = .91$). In addition, 37% of sessions were double-observed. Gwet's AC1 values for double-observed sessions ranged from .87 to 1.00 ($M = .96$, $SD = .03$) for all

double-observed sessions, with mean agreement in subsections of the code sheet being .98 ($SD = .07$) for Dimension A, .88 ($SD = .22$) for Dimension B, .96 ($SD = .04$) for Dimension C, .96 ($SD = .13$) for grouping, .98 ($SD = .06$) for materials, and .88 ($SD = .22$) for quality indicators. Discrepancies in coding were discussed until observers came to a consensus on the correct code.

Results

The research team observed a total of 3,597 minutes of English language arts instruction provided by 41 classroom teachers in grades 1–4. The mean length of observation was 29.60 minutes ($SD = 2.13$). The mean quality of instruction rating was 5.35 ($SD = 1.19$); the mean quality of classroom management rating was 5.18 ($SD = 1.44$); and the mean level of student engagement was 5.01 ($SD = 1.31$). These mean scores indicated that teachers enacted a majority of the quality indicators listed in Figure 3 within the quality of instruction and classroom management categories. Students demonstrated engagement-indicating behaviors during a majority of the lesson.

Amount and Type of Narrative Instruction Observed

As Table 3 demonstrates, 44% (1,582 minutes) of the 3,597 total minutes that were observed were devoted to story comprehension (i.e., students were engaged in comprehending text read aloud by the teacher or read independently by students); 10% (360 minutes) of total observed minutes were devoted to story writing instruction. In all of the 3,597 minutes of language arts instruction observed, teachers spent no time working with students on oral language storytelling.

Even though the observations were scheduled for times when teachers indicated that they would be teaching lessons focused on understanding literary text or creating stories, a large proportion of instructional time (41%) was spent engaged in academic activities unrelated to narrative instruction. Of the 107 instructional events coded as "academic other," approximately 33% focused on comprehension of expository texts, 11% on producing expository texts, 22% on vocabulary instruction, 17% on word reading (e.g., phonological awareness, phonics, sight words, or word reading fluency), 7% on spelling, 6% on math, and 5% on grammar. Note that these "academic other" vocabulary, word reading, and grammar activities were not implemented to support understanding or creating narratives. When instruction was focused on

Table 3. Type and Amount of Instruction Observed by Grade

Instructional Category	Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 4		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Narrative language:										
Comprehension	.42	.35	.56	.29	.41	.35	.34	.36	.44	.33
Oral	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Writing	0	0	.03	.09	.03	.11	.29	.43	.10	.27
Other (ac.)	.45	.37	.38	.32	.51	.38	.33	.33	.41	.34
Other (non-ac.)	.08	.08	.04	.04	.05	.08	.03	.04	.05	.06

Note.—M = mean (i.e., the mean proportion of total observed minutes devoted to a particular type of instruction); SD = standard deviation; Comprehension = story comprehension; Oral = oral language storytelling; Writing = story writing; ac. = academic.

understanding or creating a narrative text, we coded the event as such (i.e., as "narrative comprehension," "oral storytelling," or "story writing"), regardless of any simultaneous focus on vocabulary, word reading, grammar, or any other topic of academic instruction. We only conducted this event-subtype analysis post hoc for events coded as "academic other" because we were surprised by the large proportion of events coded as "academic other" and wanted to dig deeper into the nature and content of "academic other instruction." A small proportion of time (5%) was spent engaged in nonacademic/administrative tasks.

When results were disaggregated by grade level (see Table 3), it was evident that students in grades 1–3 spent very little time engaged in story writing, as well as having essentially no exposure to oral storytelling. Students in grade 1 had no exposure to story writing instruction. Students in grades 2 and 3 spent only 3% of instructional minutes engaged in story writing instruction. For students in grade 4, 29% of instructional time was devoted to story writing.

Macrostructure and Microstructure Elements

Table 4 lists the specific macrostructure and microstructure elements that educators addressed during the 1,942 observed minutes that included narrative instruction. In 62% of the observations of narrative instruction, at least one story grammar element was addressed. By far the most common type of story grammar instruction was teaching about character and setting; 52.1% of observations included addressed "character," and 30.6% of observations addressed the story "setting." Close to 30% of observations included discussion of character internal responses (i.e., about the way a character was feeling in response to an event). Slightly less frequently (i.e., in 18.2% of observations), teachers addressed the role of (*a*) initiating events (e.g., problem, goal) and (*b*) themes or morals in stories. In 11.6% of observations, students learned about how stories are resolved. Plans, actions, and consequences were addressed very rarely during narrative instruction (i.e., 5.0%, 6.6%, and 9.1% of observations, respectively).

During 55% of the 1,942 observed minutes of narrative instruction, teachers addressed at least one aspect of story microstructure. The most common type of story language instruction (27.3%) focused on temporal language (i.e., adverbs such as "first," "next," and "then" that facilitate the sequencing of events in stories). In 17.4% of observations, educators taught students to use causal adverbs (e.g., "because," "since," "so") to specify the causal relationships between story elements. In a smaller number of observations (11.6%), students were taught about the role of dialogue in narratives. Only 5.0% of observations included specific instruction on ways to form complex sentence structures such as coordinate or subordinate clauses; only 4.1% of the lessons guided students to recognize or create elaborated noun phrases to describe characters, settings, and objects in narratives more precisely.

Student Grouping during Instruction

Table 5 represents the student grouping arrangements that were observed. Whole-class instruction was the most typical instructional format: students spent 74.2% of observed minutes participating in whole-class instruction. Students were engaged

Table 4. Macrostructure and Microstructure Elements Addressed during Story Instruction

Element of Story Grammar and/or Language	N (%)		
	Grades 1 and 2 (N = 53 Observations)	Grades 3 and 4 (N = 68 Observations)	Total (N = 121 Observations)
Macrostructure:	32 (60.4)	44 (64.7)	76 (62.8)
Character[a]	29 (54.7)	34 (50.0)	63 (52.1)
Setting[a]	12 (22.6)	25 (36.8)	37 (30.6)
Plot[b]	5 (9.4)	4 (5.9)	9 (7.4)
Beginning, middle, end[b]	1 (1.9)	5 (7.4)	6 (5.0)
Initiating event[c]	9 (17.0)	13 (19.1)	22 (18.2)
Internal response[c]	14 (26.4)	22 (32.4)	36 (29.8)
Plans[c]	2 (3.8)	4 (5.9)	6 (5.0)
Actions[c]	4 (7.5)	4 (5.9)	8 (6.6)
Consequences[c]	2 (3.8)	9 (13.2)	11 (9.1)
Complications[c]	1 (1.9)	2 (2.9)	3 (2.5)
Resolution[c]	6 (11.3)	8 (11.8)	14 (11.6)
Themes[c]	10 (18.9)	12 (17.6)	22 (18.2)
Microstructure:	30 (56.6)	37 (54.4)	67 (55.4)
Temporal[d]	17 (32.1)	16 (23.5)	33 (27.3)
Causal[d]	8 (15.1)	13 (19.1)	21 (17.4)
Elaborated noun phrases[d]	1 (1.9)	4 (5.9)	5 (4.1)
Subordinate/coordinate clauses[d]	2 (3.8)	4 (5.9)	6 (5.0)
Dialogue[d]	6 (11.3)	8 (11.8)	14 (11.6)

Note.—N = the number of observations that included this type of story grammar or story language instruction. Observations frequently included more than one type of story grammar/language instruction (i.e., during a single observation, a teacher may have discussed both "character" and "setting"). For this reason, the numbers in any given column will not sum to the total number of observations.

[a] A code that is satisfied by mere mention of the word given here but can also be satisfied by use of different, synonymous terms.

[b] A code that is satisfied by mere mention of the word(s) given here and cannot be satisfied by use of different, synonymous terms.

[c] A code that is not satisfied by mention alone; mention/discussion must be relevant to the narrative in question, as described in the code book.

[d] A code that is satisfied not merely by teacher use of the type of language described; it requires teacher explicit instruction/discussion around how students can use this language in story analysis or development.

in independent seat work during 12.6% of observed minutes. Peer pairing and small-group instruction were relatively infrequent, occupying 2.3% and 10% of instructional time, respectively. Students in grades 3 and 4 received instruction in small groups less frequently (7.8% of instructional time) than did students in grades 1 and 2 (12.6% of instructional time). Conversely, students in grades 3 and 4 participated in more independent work time (17.7% of instructional minutes) than did students in grades 1 and 2 (6.6% of instructional time).

Table 5. Student Grouping Used during Instruction

Grouping Arrangement	Percentage of Observed Minutes		
	Grades 1 and 2	Grades 3 and 4	Total
Whole class	78.5	71.1	74.2
Small group	12.6	7.8	10.0
One-on-one	0	1.1	.6
Peer pairing	2.3	2.3	2.3
Independent	6.6	17.7	12.6

Table 6. Materials Used during Instruction

Materials	N (%)		
	Grades 1 and 2 (N = 53 Observations)	Grades 3 and 4 (N = 68 Observations)	Total (N = 121 Observations)
Wordless picture books	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Children's literature	16 (30.2)	26 (38.2)	42 (34.7)
Basal readers	20 (37.7)	8 (11.8)	28 (23.1)
Cue cards, graphic organizers, or other visual aids	21 (39.6)	28 (41.2)	49 (40.5)
Single-scene or multiple-scene picture prompts	2 (3.8)	0 (0)	2 (1.7)

Note.—N = the number of observations for which this type of material was used. Observations frequently included more than one type of material (i.e., during a single observation, a teacher may have used both "basal readers" and "cue cards"). For this reason, the numbers in any given column will not sum to the total number of observations.

Materials Used during Instruction

As is evident in Table 6, when teachers focused their lessons on comprehending or producing narratives they often used graphic organizers or other visual aids to scaffold student learning (40.5% of observations). They also used children's literature (34.7% of observations) or basal readers (23.1% of observations) to teach students about stories. Educators sometimes used single-scene or multiple-scene picture prompts during story writing instruction, but this was very rare (1.7% of observations). We did not observe any teachers using wordless picture books during narrative language instruction.

Discussion

Observation studies have the potential to provide stakeholders focused on policy, educator preparation, and professional development with important information about how research-based recommendations are implemented in typical classrooms. Results may also inform future narrative language intervention research. This study describes the narrative instruction that general education teachers provide to students in grades 1 through 4. The research team measured the amount, type, and quality of narrative instruction that occurred when teachers indicated they would be delivering a "typical lesson around understanding literary text or creating stories." We aimed to identify the degree to which typical practice narrative instruction aligned with evidence-based practices.

The research team observed a total of 3,597 instructional minutes. The quality of instruction was rated as high, as was quality of classroom management and level of student engagement.

Amount and Type of Story Instruction Observed

The amount and type of story instruction provided to students varied across teachers, with many more instructional minutes devoted to story comprehension than to story production. In all of the 3,597 minutes that were observed, teachers spent

no time working with students on oral storytelling. The absence of oral storytelling instruction in these elementary-grade classrooms is noteworthy, given the prominence of storytelling instruction in state speaking and listening standards for students in the elementary grades (e.g., CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.4, 3.4, 4.4) and the existence of research reviews that elucidate evidence-based practices for teaching oral storytelling (Nicolopoulou & Trapp, 2018; Petersen, 2011).

In addition to having no exposure to oral language storytelling instruction, students in grade 1 also had no exposure to story writing instruction during our spring observations. Students in grades 2 and 3 spent only 3% of instructional minutes engaged in story writing instruction. For students in grade 4, a greater proportion of narrative instructional time was devoted to story production, perhaps because writing achievement is assessed on state tests in grade 4. It is concerning that so little time was devoted to story writing instruction in grades 1–3 during language arts instruction. There is significant emphasis on narrative writing in state standards for those grade levels (e.g., CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.3, 2.3, 3.3), and research demonstrates positive effects of narrative writing instruction in grades 1–3. For example, a number of studies included in the Graham et al. (2012) meta-analysis targeted narrative macrostructure instruction with students in grades 1–3 (e.g., Graham et al., 2005; Harris & Graham, 2004; Harris et al., 2006, 2012; Lane et al., 2011; Riley, 1997; Tracy et al., 2009). Although there is a need for more research, and particularly for research investigating the effects of writing instruction targeting narrative microstructure (e.g., sentence-combining instruction), there is still substantial research available to guide instructional practices for educators seeking to help their students in grades 1–3 achieve narrative writing standards.

The only other grade-based difference in narrative instruction was in the domain of story comprehension. There was a slight decrease in story comprehension instruction in fourth grade (i.e., the proportion of time devoted to instruction dipped from a mean of 46% in grades 1–3 to 34% in grade 4). This decline at grade 4 may be appropriate, based on research suggesting that typically developing students do not need story grammar instruction to support story comprehension beyond grade 3 (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979, as cited in Stetter & Hughes, 2010). Decreased story comprehension instruction in grade 4 is also necessitated by the increase in the amount of story writing instruction that students received at this grade level.

Despite the fact that teachers indicated they would be delivering a typical narrative lesson during the time we observed, quite a large proportion (41%) of instructional time focused on academic activities unrelated to narrative instruction. Much of the "academic other" instruction was dedicated to expository text comprehension/production or decontextualized vocabulary learning. Time spent on nonnarrative topics of instruction is often time well spent and may be explained by the emphasis on expository text exposure and instruction in the CCSS and other state standards. Still, the prevalence of instruction focused on expository text during time periods when teachers indicated they would be teaching on the topic of story comprehension or production may instead signify that educators did not understand what was meant by instruction on "understanding literary text and creating stories" or did not have the knowledge/skills necessary to provide this instruction. Teachers may benefit from professional development focused on identifying text types (e.g., narrative, expository) and providing instruction specific to different text types.

Macrostructure and microstructure instruction. Of the total 3,597 minutes of language arts instruction that were observed, there were 1,942 minutes of narrative instruction that focused on story comprehension and/or story writing instruction. More than half of those observations included instruction on at least one story grammar element, with character and setting being the most common elements of story grammar addressed during instruction. Almost 30% of our observations of narrative instruction included at least one reference to character internal responses. Less frequently, teachers addressed the role of initiating events, story themes, and story resolution.

Stein and Glenn (1979) defined narrative macrostructure as a setting plus one or more episodes, each of which consists of an initiating event (i.e., an incident that motivates actions by the main character), a goal-directed action known as an attempt, and a consequence that is related to the outcomes of the actions. Because of the centrality of the initiating event (e.g., problem, goal) in narratives, it is noteworthy that this critical element of story grammar was addressed during less than 20% of our observations of story comprehension, oral storytelling, and story writing instruction. In addition, the plans, actions, and consequences that are emphasized in Stein and Glenn's schema were addressed very rarely during narrative instruction (during 5%, 7%, and 9% of observations, respectively). Similarly, because comprehension of story message or theme is emphasized in a number of state standards (e.g., CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.4, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.9), it may be noteworthy that themes/morals were addressed during less than 20% of observed lessons.

The most common types of microstructure elements addressed during narrative instruction were temporal language (27% of observations) and causal language (17% of observations). In the Petersen (2011) synthesis, studies that reported moderate to large effects in favor of treatment included explicit instruction in the use of language that conveyed temporal and causal relations. Nicolopoulou and Trapp (2018) also identified temporal and causal language as elements of effective narrative interventions. As a result, one might expect to see even more instruction around causal and temporal language during typical narrative instruction.

In some observations of narrative instruction (12%), students learned about the role of dialogue. However, instruction rarely addressed the construction of complex sentences that explain when, where, or how an action occurred (i.e., to use subordinate or coordinate clauses or adverbial conjunctions). Similarly, teachers rarely guided students to recognize or create elaborated noun phrases to describe characters, settings, and objects in narratives more precisely. This low rate of instruction is concerning as noun phrases, subordinate clauses, and dialogue are associated with positive effects on narrative outcomes (Nicolopoulou & Trapp, 2018).

State standards specify story language that students are expected to use in speaking and writing. For instance, grade 1 students are often expected to "use temporal words to signal event order" (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.3); by grade 4, students may be expected to "write narratives . . . using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences," including dialogue and a "variety of transitional words and phrases to manage the sequence of events" (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3). However, although narrative microstructure is considered a critical component of cohesive narratives, there is limited research identifying effective approaches to teaching narrative microstructure (Nicolopoulou & Trapp, 2018; Petersen, 2011) and thus little guidance for educators seeking to help students meet these standards.

Student grouping during instruction. Whole-class instruction was the most typical instructional format, with independent seat work the second most prevalent student grouping format. Small-group instruction and peer pairings were observed relatively infrequently, despite the fact that partner and small-group learning have been associated with improved academic outcomes for students in both general and special education classroom settings (Elbaum et al., 2000; Lou et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 1999; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007). Recent research has reported increases in partner and small-group learning relative to whole-class instruction (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006; Ford & Opitz, 2008; Swanson et al., 2012), after a time period (from 1990 to the early 2000s) when small-group instruction had been in decline relative to whole-class instruction (Vaughn et al., 2002). It was unexpected, then, that students receiving narrative instruction in grades 1 through 4 were provided so little instructional time engaged in collaborative work with peers.

Materials. Whereas teachers frequently used children's literature or basal readers to teach students about stories, none used wordless picture books during narrative language instruction. In only a couple of observations did teachers use single-scene or multiple-scene pictures to prompt story writing. In the Petersen (2011) synthesis, a number of effective interventions were similar in their use of certain types of instructional materials, including their use of single images and/or wordless picture books to elicit narratives. The use of icons or cue cards to represent story grammar elements was also associated with positive effects in the Petersen (2011) synthesis. In our observations, narrative instruction often included graphic organizers or other visual aids as scaffolds for students' understanding and/or production of narratives.

Limitations

This study included a relatively large sample of teachers ($N = 41$) compared with similar studies observing reading instruction (Kent et al., 2017; Walker & Stevens, 2017). Still, it was conducted over a relatively short period of time in the spring of 2018. It is possible that there was a greater narrative storytelling emphasis during the fall of the year in the schools where we observed. Similarly, it is possible that a certain story grammar element or aspect of story language (e.g., initiating events, elaborative noun phrases) was addressed emphatically during the fall of the year, and for this reason it was not addressed in the spring. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that spring instruction in grades at which state tests were administered may have been influenced by the content of these tests in reading (grades 2, 3, and 4 in Rocky Mountain West schools and grades 3 and 4 in southwestern US schools) and writing (grade 4).

We were also only able to collect three observations for each of our teacher participants. Our sample size placed constraints on the data analyses that were possible in this study. Future observation studies would do well to include a larger number of observations for a larger sample of teacher participants, allowing researchers to examine how teacher-level narrative instruction predicts student-level outcomes.

A greater number of observations would not only have provided additional data but may have also reduced the potential for observer effects. There are a number of potential threats to reliability and validity of data collected through observation, with observer effects being foremost among them. Although we conducted three observations for each teacher to allow for habituation to the observation condition, it is

nevertheless possible that teachers prepared and taught lessons differently because they knew someone would be observing instruction in their classrooms. However, in this case, it is possible that they would have been more likely than usual to focus on narrative instruction because observations were scheduled at times when teachers indicated that they would be delivering a lesson focused on producing or comprehending narratives.

Wilkins (2010) found that teacher self-efficacy can affect the amount of time teachers devote to planning and delivering instruction, and studies examining within-teacher variation in self-efficacy indicate that teachers' feelings of efficacy may vary depending on the subject of instruction as well as the type of instructional activity and the composition of the class (Benz et al., 1992; Raudenbush et al., 1992; Ross et al., 1999, as cited by Graham et al., 2001). We acknowledge that it is possible that elementary-grade teachers have a lower sense of self-efficacy for teaching oral storytelling or writing than for teaching reading: Troia and Graham (2016) found that fewer than half of nearly 500 randomly sampled teachers in grades 3 through 8 reported having taken a college class that devoted significant time to the teaching of writing and fewer than a third had taken a class solely devoted to how children learn to write. Teachers only somewhat agreed that their efforts were associated with students' writing improvement (33.6% agreed or strongly agreed) and on average lacked confidence that their knowledge of instructional steps to take to teach a writing concept or skill were associated with student mastery (44.6% agreed or strongly agreed). That said, in a separate survey of primary-grade writing teachers conducted by Cutler and Graham (2008), most teachers moderately agreed that they were effective teachers of writing and 28% of teachers indicated that they received very good to exceptional preservice writing instruction, with another 44% responding that the quality of their preparation was adequate. Regardless, it is possible that observed teachers typically deliver more oral storytelling or story writing instruction than they did when being observed during this study, just as it is possible that there were other observer effects that made our findings imperfectly representative of business-as-usual narrative instruction in observed classrooms.

Deficits in interobserver reliability are also a potential threat to the validity of observation study findings. Although we provided extensive training, certified observers' reliability before observations began using the gold standard method (ensuring at least 90% observer agreement in each of seven sections of the code sheet), and achieved a mean of 96.3% agreement (range: 87.5%–100%) for all double-observed sessions, it would have been desirable to report a statistical estimate of interobserver reliability such as Cohen's kappa. Unfortunately, the small number of observations conducted by each observer pair (in some cases, a given pair of observers only double-observed one class session together) made it impossible to generate trustworthy estimates using a Cohen's kappa.

Implications for Practice

Narrative language ability predicts reading comprehension (e.g., Catts et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2004; Kendeou et al., 2009; Wellman et al., 2011) and writing achievement (e.g., Fey et al., 2004; Olinghouse & Leaird, 2009) during the elementary school years. The importance of narrative instruction is reflected across the reading, speaking,

and writing strands of elementary-grade state standards. The results of this study suggest that narrative story production was not a focus of instruction in the primary-grade classrooms that we observed, despite the fact that observations were conducted when teachers indicated they would be delivering instruction around understanding literary text or creating stories. It is possible that there was a greater narrative story-telling and/or story writing curricular emphasis during the fall of the year. Still, to ensure that students are gaining adequate exposure to narrative story production instruction, it may be useful for elementary-grade educators and school administrators to examine professional development goals and curricular objectives around (*a*) oral storytelling instruction and (*b*) story writing in grades 1 through 3, so that students are prepared to meet grade-level standards in these domains.

In addition, if what we observed during the spring holds true for the rest of the school year, results suggest that all types of narrative instruction in grades 1–4 tend to omit elements of narrative instruction that are associated with improved narrative language comprehension, storytelling, and writing outcomes in intervention research. Educators frequently appear comfortable teaching students about story comprehension and production by including information about characters and setting. But our findings suggest that educators may benefit from professional development and curricular emphasis on macrostructure and microstructure elements, according to Stein and Glenn (1979) and other prominent narrative macrostructure theorists. During typical narrative instruction, students may not learn enough about the components of episodes in stories, namely initiating events (i.e., problems, goals, or other situations that motivate action by the main character), character internal responses and/or plans to act in response to the initiating event, goal-directed actions that carry out these plans, and consequences that relate to the initiating event and actions. Knowledge of these critical structures of stories are likely to provide scaffolds in long-term memory that aid in narrative comprehension (both listening and reading) and production.

Finally, previous research indicates that elementary-grade students benefit from opportunities to work in peer pairings or small groups (Hattie, 2009). Providing more opportunities for students to work with partners or small groups will increase students' opportunities to respond in oral language and to engage in the repeated retelling and story generation that was common to effective oral storytelling interventions according to Petersen (2011). It may also be beneficial for elementary-grade teachers to be supported in employing single- or multiple-scene picture prompts or wordless picture books to elicit story production during narrative instruction.

It is worth noting that narrative instruction tested in research is frequently, if not always, developed by speech-language pathologists (SLPs), and the tutors who deliver instruction during these research studies are SLPs or SLPs-in-training (e.g., Gillam et al., 2014). This study indicates that there may be substantial room for improvement to instruction provided by general education teachers who do not have this training. It may be useful for SLPs to provide training in effective narrative instruction practices to general education teachers during teacher preparation programs or professional development curricula. There appears to be a substantive gap between recommendations based on research and typical practice; reducing this gap and helping teachers provide better narrative instruction has the potential to significantly improve student outcomes.

Implications for Future Research

This is the only observation study that we have been able to identify on the topic of narrative instruction. The uniqueness of this study is one of its strengths. However, referring to previous observation studies on this topic would have allowed us to better contextualize our findings. It will be important to see how our results replicate with other participant populations. Evidence that these results replicate with other participant populations will allow for better confidence in the present study's findings. In addition, future observation research that examines the impact of amount and/or quality of core narrative instruction on measures of student performance would help elucidate the narrative instructional practices associated with improved student outcomes.

As mentioned previously, much of the narrative instruction intervention research included in systematic reviews (e.g., Nicolopoulou & Trapp, 2018; Petersen, 2011) has been conducted by SLPs with the intention of helping students with language impairments. Little research has been done investigating the effects of narrative instruction in general education settings. Because elementary-grade narrative proficiency is an important target of state standards and because it is associated with growth across a range of academic outcomes, it would be valuable to conduct research on narrative instruction in general education settings.

Researchers and practitioners would also benefit from future research on the topic of effective narrative microstructure instruction in the elementary grades. Theories of narrative comprehension and production indicate that story cohesion depends to a large extent on use of linguistic devices that convey temporal, causal, and referential relations. Still, there is very little research identifying effective approaches to teaching students to use these types of story language in their storytelling or writing. It would be beneficial for research to provide more guidance to educators and schools as far as the best ways to teach students to construct complex sentences (e.g., ones explaining when, where, or how an action occurred), develop elaborated noun phrases to describe characters, settings, and objects in narratives more precisely, and engage in other types of story language prioritized in state standards (e.g., CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.3, 2.3, 3.3, 4.3).

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