**Introduction**

Previous research has established that children's narrative ability is an important skill that has been linked to future language ability, school readiness, and higher-order cognitive control processes.

Research by Applebee (1978) found that storytelling begins at approximately age two and progresses through six stages of development.

Children's narrative ability develops rapidly throughout the preschool years, and most reach the final stage at approximately age six.

**Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to examine the narrative ability of a typically developing sample of three-year-olds.

Based on previous research by Applebee (1978), we predicted that most participants would be telling stories at either the sequence or primitive narrative stage.

**Methods**

Participants

22 children (36-45 months, mean age= 38.5 months)

11 males, 11 females

Picture Book Task

Children told a story using the wordless book *Goodnight Gorilla* (1994). Narratives were recorded and scored based on the Applebee stages of narrative development (1978).

**Stages of Narrative Development**

- **Heap**: No overarching structure
- **Sequence**: Elements linked by similarity
- **Primitive Narrative**: Elements linked to central idea
- **Unfocused Chain**: Presence of cause and effect
- **Focused Chain**: Cause and effect + central idea
- **True Narrative**: Each event builds on previous event, ends links to beginning

**Results and Discussion**

- The majority of children produced narratives at the sequence or primitive narrative stage, which is consistent with Applebee's (1978) research
- No significant difference in stage levels between males and females
- No significant correlation between age of child and stage of narrative

Based on this data, it appears that although there is variability in preschoolers' narratives, almost all 3-year-olds lack causal relationships between story events.

Children in this study will be followed over one year to determine how their narratives advance and if they will link to other aspects of functioning (e.g., cognitive skills).

**References**

