Pictography: A Narrative Representation Tool

Stories are long and multifaceted, and the spoken word is a transitory event. The SLP needs a way of representing stories with structural support that aids memory, reflection, revision, and sharing.

An obvious method of representation is writing. Unfortunately, writing is painfully slow for many students with language-learning disabilities. Text production fully occupies their mental resources and they may be challenged to even read their own work. Revision, if it occurs at all, deals with only the mechanics of writing (Butler-Nalin, 1984; Flower & Hayes, 1980). Story content and organization are forgotten. The dynamic and pleasurable interchange of narrative creation grinds to a halt under the demand to write.

Drawing is an alternative to writing. In the early grades, drawing is often recommended as a prewriting strategy. It stimulates story ideas and provides visual reminders of story details (Calkins, 1986; Myers, 1983). However, beyond the first grade, drawing has limited utility within the composition process. Static, detailed images do not lend themselves to temporal or causal organization. As well, the aesthetic involvement distracts the author from the task of narrative composition.

An alternative to drawing and writing is a notation that employs aspects of both. Pictography, or picture writing, does not represent words directly. Rather, it represents ideas and events that can also be carried in language (Gelb, 1952). Such a representation system requires only a handful of scenes to represent a narrative. Pictography is composed of simple, schematic sketches, organized in a left-to-right, chronologically based layout. Figure 5.1 on page 224 illustrates a pictographic representation. Pictography combines the ease of simple drawings with some of the representational ability of writing. Pictography falls within the general domain of graphic organizers, which present information in words, phrases, or occasionally pictures, using schematic networks that emphasize the relationship among concepts (Pehrsson & Denner, 1988). Pictography differs from other graphic organizers in that the representation is primarily pictorial, and the focus is on representing the chronology of events rather than concept analysis.

Pictography provides memory and organizational support for stories, allowing recall and discussion of oral narratives and early drafts of written narratives or procedural exposition. As a low-technology tool that students can use independently, pictography has applications both as a structural support for language development and as an ongoing compensatory strategy within the classroom (McFadden, 1998; Ukrainetz, 1998).
Facilitating Sequence and Content

Pictography has powerful effects on temporal organization and quality of discourse. The multiple scenes and arrows clearly suggest movement through time. Students who employ primarily description sequences move into action sequences with the aid of pictography (McFadden, 1998; Ukrainianz, 1998). Pictography, lacking the complications of print, also allows greater attention to idea production. Students' stories are longer, better quality, and are drafted faster. This advantage is most apparent for students with the greatest difficulty writing.

Teaching Pictography

Pictography, or picture writing, is easily taught to students, who often call it "stickwriting," reflecting the stick figure people inhabiting the pictures. Pictography can consist of as few as three scenes (beginning, middle, and end) or as many as a dozen. The pictography is organized left-to-right and top-to-bottom, to make it similar to writing. Movement through time is represented with arrows between each action scene. Complex episodic structure can be graphically represented as shown in Figure 5.2. This story, about the solution to an overturned truck, emphasizes the multiple attempts to solve and the outcomes of each.
Students learn the physical form of pictography without difficulty. For example, a second grader provided the pictography in Figure 5.3 on page 226 in his second encounter with this representational form. Within as little as a single teaching session, students from first to seventh grade can accomplish the schematic sketches and graphic organization. To keep the focus on the story rather than the drawing, the sketches must be “quick and easy” and “just enough to remember.”

Pictography is presented to students via modeling. The SLP demonstrates the story’s pictographic creation, not just the finished product. The SLP thinks aloud throughout the process, demonstrating how to select key ideas, make simple sketches, and organize the content. Box 5.8 on page 227 illustrates this process. The students then retell the story from the pictography.

A small next step has the students take dictation. The SLP tells a short story and the students use pictography to represent it. The SLP talks them through their sketching, commenting on their selection of key notations, using the quick and easy rule, and organizing left-to-right with arrows. After this step, students move into using pictography for their own ideas. The SLP again
talks them through the story and the sketching. The emphasis is always on “quick and easy.” Writing is not allowed unless it is produced quickly and easily. This rule has some related benefits, which will be discussed later.

Applications
Narrative structure and pictographic representation go hand in hand. Although students have story ideas, they need help sequencing and chunking the ideas in manageable pieces, both for the story and for the visual representation. As the student learns to represent narratives with pictography, chronological order and sequence also emerge.

After the pictographic draft, the story is discussed. The parts can be coded as setting, complication, attempt, and consequence. As students compose or revise their stories, they are guided into using motivating states, plans, attempts, or consequences. Depending on the language objectives, the lesson’s focus may be on retelling the story coherently and sequentially, using a particular story structure, or revision and extension. Particular words, events, details, or sequences that would improve the story can be added.

Pictography is applicable to the classroom composition process. Within the composition process, substantive revision is particularly challenging for students with writing difficulties. Pictography supports revision. It is best
Teaching Pictography through Modeling the Process for the Scary Visitor Story

I am going to make up a story about kids who get tricked. I'll start over here, in the top-left corner. I'll go to the right, like writing. The story is going to be about a girl, Teresa, and her brother, Paul. Once, there were two children, named Teresa and Paul. They stayed home one Saturday morning to watch cartoons. I'll draw two stick people. No faces, that takes too long. Quick and easy, that's the rule. I will just put a roof shape over their heads to show the house. That isn't a very good house, is it? But it is good enough to remember. There is a sun to show daytime. And here is a quicky television. A figure with a circle inside. Good enough. Then, see, I put an arrow to the right to show where to go for the next part of the story. Then the children heard a knock at the door. See the lines? That means a loud sound. They looked through the window and saw something furry. Teresa thought it might be a bear! They were scared, so they hid behind the chair. Someone knocked again, louder. Teresa locked the door. See that X? That means lock the door. Then a voice said, "Hey kids, it's Mom!" I put "Mom" in a balloon like in the comics. Just one word, that's quick and easy, and enough to remember. Now another arrow. It was just their mother. She had groceries in both hands, so she couldn't open the door. She was all fuzzy because she just got a perm. See, I made her hair really big and gave her groceries in both hands. They helped her carry the groceries in and laughed about how silly they had been. The end. I put a period for the end. Kind of like writing.

suited to organizational revision, where episodic elements are added or parts are rearranged. They can be inserted or the pictography can easily be redone. Some word level revision can also occur. Nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs can be noted at points in the story. So long as the need is limited to a few words, they can be combined with pictography.

A classroom teacher had her third- and fourth-grade students use pictography in composing imaginative narratives (Ukrainetz, 1998). The students were asked to imagine and write a story about a day in the life of a dinosaur. The teacher discussed story possibilities, then modeled drafting a story using pictography on chart paper. The teacher's story was long, with 15 action
scenes. The students then did their own pictography and followed it with written composition. The teacher reported that the pictography procured such sufficiently good written results that she considered it a first draft, rather than a prewriting draft.

Pictography works well in cooperative groups. One student can devote full attention to the story generation while another student scribes pictographically. Pictography can also assist listening comprehension. While students are listening to a story, the SLP periodically stops reading and asks them to sketch the part of the story they have heard. Students attend better and recall more details this way than by simply listening to the story.

Older and Younger Students
Pictography is challenging for kindergartners and preschoolers, who have difficulty producing these schematic images. Stickwriting and artistic drawing look much the same at this age, and mental resources are fully occupied producing the simplest images. However, young students can tell stories from adult pictography. Paley's (1990) kindergartners dramatized stories that they had previously composed via dictation. Instead of dictation, which the students cannot read themselves, adult-composed pictography can be used to support their tellings. Charting out a cooperatively created story or a previously read storybook allows for a visual guide that can be used for story retelling or dramatic reenactments.

A benefit for older elementary students is improvement of note taking. Students' prior lessons in spelling, grammar, and presentation interfere with note taking, which involves writing only significant words and phrases while maintaining online comprehension of the content read or heard. Students tend to write full sentences with correct spelling even when explicitly directed to generate only key words (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982). With pictography, the SLP already models key words and strategic punctuation such as "Help!" in a speech bubble. This model can be moved intentionally into a written rather than pictorial display. Older students may spontaneously take writing further (Ukraintetz, 1998). They start to "sneak in" written words. They must select words they can write fast enough to keep within the "quick and easy" rule and they tend to select words that they could have pictorially represented, predisposing without direct instruction toward selection of key words. Figure 5.4 on page 232 shows the spontaneous key-word planning composed by three older elementary students with learning disabilities.
Key Word Planning in Place of Pictography

This story of an overturned truck and a lost child is by older elementary students and contains an embedded episode.

The Kid That Fell Out of The Truck

- Car moving U/A
- 2 trucks
- flipped
- baby thrown out
e

Get

Granny almost

A Ambulance came

Kid lost

Drop

Tow truck

Yelling

Look

They took kid home parents got the out

Police found the truck and happy