QUALITY OVER QUANTITY: AN EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION OF INTERVIEWS CONTAINING A PRACTICE NARRATIVE

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Brittany Frances Whiting
Regina, Saskatchewan
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Brittany Frances Whiting, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology, has presented a thesis titled, *Quality Over Quantity: An Experimental Evaluation of Interviews Containing a Practice Narrative*, in an oral examination held on August 14, 2013. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

External Examiner: Dr. Nick Jones, Department of Justice Studies

Supervisor: Dr. Heather Price, Department of Psychology

Committee Member: *Dr. Kristi Wright, Department of Psychology

Committee Member: Dr. Christopher J. Oriet, Department of Psychology

Chair of Defense: Professor Wes Pearce, Department of Theatre

*Not present at defense*
Abstract

Investigative interviews with children are meant to give children the opportunity to provide forensically relevant information to investigators. One recommendation to improve the quality and quantity of information gained during forensic interviews is to provide children with the opportunity to learn and practice responding to open-ended prompts in an informative way (i.e., a practice narrative). In the present study, the topic of the practice narrative (unique event vs. commonplace event) and the duration of the practice narrative (0 minutes vs. 2 minutes vs. 5 minutes) was manipulated to determine which components of a practice narrative are essential for increasing the overall quality of interviews with children. As expected, children who participate in a practice narrative provided more details and more accurate details in the substantive phase of the interview compared to children who did not participate in a practice narrative. Children who discussed a unique event during the practice narrative were more informative in response to the initial prompt in the substantive phase compared to children who discussed a commonplace event. Additionally, clear benefits of the practice narrative were observed with as little as two minutes of exposure; however, there was little evidence that conducting a practice narrative for a longer duration was more beneficial. The results of the current study provide empirical evidence demonstrating that the components of a practice narrative are important to the overall success of the interview. To maximize the amount of uncontaminated information gained from the initial prompt in the substantive phase, it is recommended that interviewers include a practice narrative in their investigative interviews and rely on open-ended prompts to discuss a unique and memorable event during the practice narrative.
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Dedication

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Quality Over Quantity: An Experimental Evaluation of
Interviews Containing a Practice Narrative

Investigative interviews with children often provide the only real insight into what has occurred when there is suspicion that a child may be the victim of abuse or witness to a crime (Lamb, Sternberg, & Esplin, 1998). For this reason, it is crucial that children be given the best opportunity to provide accurate and relevant information to investigators. Over the last few decades there have been improvements to the way in which evidence is elicited from children and other vulnerable populations. However, child eyewitnesses continue to be viewed as less accurate and less informative than adult eyewitnesses (Bala, Lee, & McNamara, 2001). Previous research indicates that the interviewing techniques used to obtain information from children greatly affect the accuracy of children’s accounts (Bull, 2010; Lamb et al., 1998; Poole & Lindsay, 1998). Poorly conducted interviews can lead some children to report details that never occurred (Connolly & Lindsay, 2001; Melinder et al., 2010; Roberts & Powell, 2006) and other children to report memories for entire events that never occurred (Ceci & Bruck, 1993; Ceci, Loftus, Leichtman, & Bruck, 1994). Specifically, using directed questions which focus the child’s attention on a topic (e.g., “Where were you when it happened?”; Peterson & Bell, 1996), or using highly suggestive questions (e.g., “He took off your clothes, didn’t he?”; Bruck & Ceci, 1999; Ceci & Bruck, 1993; Goodman, Bottoms, & Schwartz-Kenney, 1991), can negatively impact children’s accuracy. Although it is unclear how often these types of false reports occur within the legal system, ideally investigators should seek to employ interviewing techniques that decrease this possibility in order to reduce the chances of an innocent suspect being wrongfully.
Professionals have developed different interviewing strategies and techniques to help investigators obtain uncontaminated accounts of forensically relevant information from children (e.g., Cognitive Interviews, Stepwise Interviews, Narrative Elaboration Technique; see Goodman & Melinder, 2007 for a review; Saywitz & Snyder, 1996). For example, researchers from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) have put forth a thorough interviewing protocol which incorporates a number of best-practice interviewing techniques. Specifically, the NICHD Interviewing Protocol outlines how to conduct an appropriate, non-suggestive, informative investigative interview with a child (Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin, & Horowitz, 2007). The NICHD Interviewing Protocol is a phased process that encourages interviewers to rely on open-ended prompts that allow the child to freely report information in their own way (e.g., “Tell me everything that happened from the beginning to the end”; Lamb, La Rooy, Malloy, & Katz, 2011). One recommended strategy found in the NICHD Interviewing Protocol (Roberts, Brubacher, Powell, & Price, 2011) is to implement a practice interview or narrative prior to the introduction of substantive issues (i.e., prior to discussing forensically relevant information).

**Practice Narratives**

A practice narrative is a brief discussion about a recently experienced neutral or positive event that is unrelated to the forensically relevant information the interviewer seeks to obtain (Roberts et al., 2011). Practice narratives are believed to be helpful to a forensic interview because they provide children with an opportunity to practice responding to open-ended prompts in an informative way prior to discussing the substantive issues. It is believed that the practice narrative provides children with an
opportunity to practice remembering events and reporting them to the interviewer in a free-recall manner (i.e., reporting everything they can remember without hints or cues from the interviewer). Ideally, a practice narrative will help train the child to describe events that they have experienced in detail with minimal prompting from the interviewer (Sternberg et al., 1997). It is also believed that discussing a neutral or positive recent event in detail provides the child with additional time to feel comfortable disclosing information. Therefore, practice narratives may help to maintain previously established rapport between the interviewer and the child, which can be crucial during the substantive phase of the interview. The inclusion of a practice narrative in an investigative interview has been recommended in the NICHD Interviewing Protocol despite little empirical evidence demonstrating practice narratives produce these beneficial results (Lamb et al., 2007). Rather, the recommendation to include a practice narrative is made based on the knowledge that properly conducted practice narratives include a number of well-researched properties that are thought to improve children’s reports.

**Recommendations**

The NICHD Interviewing Protocol outlines several recommendations for how to conduct a proper practice narrative (Lamb et al., 2007). The general recommendation is that the practice narrative phase of the interview should follow the same best practice guidelines as the investigation-relevant, or substantive, phase of the interview (Roberts et al., 2011). This is recommended because it is believed that the early part of the interview (i.e., the practice narrative) can influence how the later part of the interview is conducted (i.e., the substantive phase). Although practice narratives themselves have not been extensively researched, the components of a recommended practice narrative, such as
language use and prompt type, have been demonstrated as beneficial. Specifically, in the practice narrative phase of the interview, the interviewer should rely on open-ended prompts and use episodic language.

**Using open-ended prompts.** Open-ended prompts are interviewer utterances that do not direct the child’s attention to specific details, but rather allow the child to report information as they recall it (e.g., “Tell me more”, “What happened next?”). Reliance on open-ended prompts is highly recommended for a variety of reasons. Open-ended prompts are thought to encourage a free-recall style of remembering and reporting information (Lamb et al., 2007; Sternberg, Lamb, Davies, & Westcott, 2001). These prompts allow the child to spontaneously report what he or she remembers because the prompts do not contain specific cues to guide or lead the child to discuss what the investigator believes is relevant or important information. This is especially important because children may be more familiar with situations in which their memory is tested by adults who are, presumably, already aware of the “correct” response (“Do you remember what we did yesterday?”) which makes them particularly vulnerable to “hints” or suggestions from interviewers (Lamb et al., 1998). Open-ended prompts are seen as superior to question types that require the child to confirm or deny aspects of the event(s) that took place (e.g., “Did the man have a beard?”, “Were you outside?”; Dale, Loftus, & Rathbun, 1978). This perceived superiority is largely a result of evidence that having the child freely recall and report information from memory produces more accurate reports compared to directed questioning interview techniques (Bull, 2010; Dent & Stephenson, 1979; Hutcheson, Baxter, Telfer, & Warden, 1995; Lamb et al., 1996; Phillips, Oxburgh, Gavin, & Myklebust, 2011). Questions or prompts that produce a free-recall style of
reporting are seen as highly beneficial because these reports are less likely to be
contaminated by the interviewer (Aldridge & Cameron, 1999).

Open-ended prompts have also been shown to improve the quality of children’s
reports. For example, Sternberg et al. (1996) found that using open-ended prompts in the
substantive phase of the interview resulted in both longer responses (the children said
more) and richer responses (the children’s responses contained more information).
Orbach and Lamb (2000) evaluated two forensic interviews in detail and determined that
the majority of the substantive information obtained during the interviews was in
response to open-ended prompts. Orbach and Lamb also found that by using a series of
open-ended prompts, the interviewer obtained more detailed accounts from both a five-
year old and a fifteen-year old.

The practice narrative phase of the interview likely benefits both interviewers and
children. Price, Roberts, and Collins (2013) found that investigative interviews that
included a proper practice narrative, in which the interviewer posed a high proportion of
open-ended prompts, were more likely to be followed by a substantive phase in which the
interviewer posed a higher proportion of open-ended prompts, relative to interviews that
did not have a practice narrative. Using open-ended prompts in the practice narrative is
also thought to give children an opportunity to practice responding to this type of
questioning format (Roberts et al., 2011). This is thought to be beneficial, especially for
younger children who may be more familiar with adults asking yes/no questions (e.g.,
“Did you have fun at school today?”) or option posing questions (e.g., “Do you want
crackers and cheese, or toast and jam?”) and therefore need practice understanding and
responding to open-ended prompts (Lamb & Brown, 2006).
Using episodic language. It is also recommended that interviewers use language that encourages the child to report details in an episodic manner (e.g., “One day we went swimming”) rather than in a generic manner (e.g., “Sometimes we swim”). In criminal investigations, children may be required to provide specific event details in order for the investigation and later prosecution to proceed (Guadagno, Powell, & Wright, 2006; R. v. B. (G.), 1990). That is, a child may need to provide specific details about a particular instance of the allegations (e.g., the first time or the last time the alleged abuse occurred). However, children tend to report what usually happens during an event that occurs repeatedly rather than the specific details of one instance or one episode of that event (Fivush, Hudson, & Nelson, 1984). This tendency is particularly problematic for children who have experienced abuse on multiple occasions but are required to report specific details of one instance of abuse (Schneider, Price, Roberts, & Hedrick, 2011).

Other research demonstrated that children tend to mimic the speech patterns of their adult interviewers. Schneider et al. (2011) evaluated investigative interviews with children and found that the language used by the interviewer appeared to affect the language used by the children. When children were asked an episodic question (e.g., “Tell me what happened after school that day.”), they tended to respond in an episodic manner, whereas when they were asked a generically-worded question (e.g., “Tell me what happens after school”), they tended to respond with generic language. Moreover, conversational research suggests that the interviewer’s speech patterns or styles can influence the speech patterns of the interviewee (Hannah & Murachver, 1999), implying that interviewers should consistently use the type of speech that they want the child to
produce (i.e., episodic language). These results provide further support for the use of episodic prompting within the substantive phase of the interview.

The language used by the interviewer in the practice narrative can also affect children’s language use in the later substantive phase of the interview. In Brubacher, Roberts, and Powell’s (2011) study, interviewers either conducted a generic practice narrative (e.g., “Tell me what happens when...”) or an episodic practice narrative (e.g., “Tell me what happened when...”) with the children prior to conducting an open-ended interview about a play session the children had participated in. They found that compared to the children in the generic practice narrative condition, the children who were in the episodic practice narrative condition used more episodic language in the substantive phase. This finding suggests that children are indeed practicing response formats in the early part of the interview and that a practice narrative can be helpful for encouraging the use of desirable episodic language throughout the entire interview.

**Potential Benefits**

Including a practice narrative in an investigative interview with a child has been linked to several benefits. First, practice narratives require that the interviewer spends additional time talking about neutral or positive topics. This enables the interviewer and child to get to know each other more. The extra time spent in the practice narrative phase of the interview can be seen as extra rapport building (Roberts et al., 2011). This has been used by interviewers to maintain a respectful environment, and ideally, one in which the child feels comfortable disclosing personal information. A practice narrative can also be used by the interviewer as an opportunity to informally assess the child’s developmental level with respect to language abilities, maturity, and comprehension (Saywitz,
Nathanson, & Snyder, 1993). As previously discussed, the practice narrative provides an opportunity for the interviewer to practice using appropriate language and appropriate question types (i.e., developmentally-appropriate episodic language and open-ended prompts).

Practice narratives also appear to be beneficial to the overall interview in terms of the amount of detail reported by the children who participate in a practice narrative. For example, Price et al. (2013) looked at forensic interviews conducted by trained police officers and child protection workers and found that children who participated in a practice narrative were asked fewer questions during the substantive phase of the interview but reported more details per prompt than children who were not given the opportunity to participate in a practice narrative. That is, Price et al. (2013) found that each of the prompts posed by interviewers who conducted a practice narrative was, on average, more effective at eliciting information than prompts posed by interviewers who did not conduct a practice narrative. Additionally, there is some evidence that the way the interviewer conducts the pre-substantive phase of the interview can influence the child’s accuracy. Specifically, Roberts, Lamb, and Sternberg (2004) found that conducting the rapport phase of the interview using an open-ended prompt method, similar to what is recommended during a practice narrative, increased the accuracy of the children’s reports. An interviewing technique that reduces the number of questions asked and increases the informativeness and accuracy of the responses is highly beneficial. Again, interviewers want to minimize the influence they have on the child’s responses and create a situation in which the child freely recalls information from memory and reports it to the interviewer in a narrative format (Gordon, Baker-Ward, & Ornstein, 2001).
Unresolved Issues

Despite the apparent benefits and the recommendation to use practice narratives in investigative interviews with children, interviewers report being unsure of how to properly conduct these practice narratives (Price et al., 2013). They may be unsure of how long the practice narrative should be, or what topic should be discussed (Roberts et al., 2011). Unfortunately, researchers are not yet able to answer these questions with empirical data. The recommended components of a practice narrative (i.e., prompt type and language use) have been derived based on empirical evidence. However, there has been little research specifically aimed at understanding the unique contribution of conducting a practice narrative or on which components of the practice narrative are essential to the overall success of the investigative interview. In order to address interviewers’ concerns and make recommendations on how to optimize children’s interview performance by conducting a practice narrative, the key components of a practice narrative must first be assessed.

Currently, the NICHD Interviewing Protocol (Lamb et al., 2007) suggests that the interviewer conduct a practice narrative, but does not indicate how long this phase of the interview should last. Some interviewers are concerned that a lengthy practice narrative may be an improper use of the investigator’s time and a potentially fatiguing endeavour for the child (Roberts et al., 2011). Conversely, too short of a practice narrative may not have the desired effect. In both field evaluations (Price et al., 2013; Sternberg et al., 1997) and experimental settings (Brubacher et al., 2011; Roberts et al., 2004) the length of time the interviewer spends in the practice narrative phase of the interview has been allowed to occur naturally and was measured after the fact. Assuming that practice
narratives provide children with practice responding to the interviewer’s prompts in an informative manner, it seems likely that a minimum amount of time would be required for the child to develop this ability. However, at this time, researchers are not yet able to offer specific empirically-based suggestions on how much time to spend in this phase of the interview.

Interviewers are also concerned with choosing an appropriate topic to use for the practice narrative phase of the interview. A general recommendation has been to ask about a past significant event, such as a recent birthday party or holiday (Roberts et al., 2011). However, these events are not always recent enough for the child to provide sufficient detail (Price et al., 2013). In the event that an appropriate practice narrative topic is unavailable, the NICHD Interviewing Protocol recommends having the child describe yesterday’s events in detail (Lamb et al., 2007). If the child is unable to describe what he or she did yesterday, it is recommended that the child describe the events of the current day from the moment of waking up to the time of the interview (Lamb et al., 2011). It is unclear whether discussing commonplace events, such as what the child did yesterday, will result in the same benefits as discussing a unique occurrence. There are even concerns that having a child discuss a commonplace event in a generic manner during a practice narrative might negatively impact the child’s report(s) during the substantive phase of the interview (Brubacher et al., 2011). There is no empirical research aimed at determining which topic areas (unique events vs. commonplace events) are best suited for discussion during a practice narrative with a child. At this time, researchers are unable to provide empirically-based advice on how to identify an appropriate topic for discussion during a practice narrative. The first step in providing detailed
recommendations is to determine which topic types (unique events or commonplace events) are best for improving children’s performance in the substantive phase of the interview. In particular, it is important to clarify whether or not the NICHD’s second-best recommendation to discuss potentially routine events (i.e., yesterday) is helpful or harmful to the overall interview. Once this is determined, the next step is to reduce interviewers’ struggle to identify an appropriate topic by informing them of these findings and providing them with a list of suitable practice narrative topics to choose from.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to experimentally explore which aspects of a practice narrative are essential for producing an informative and accurate account regarding the substantive issues from children. To conduct the most effective forensic interviews, it is first necessary to understand which discussion topics make for the most effective practice narratives. For example, compared to discussing unique or memorable events (i.e., the NICHD’s first recommendation), discussing an event that involves everyday occurrences or commonplace events (i.e., the NICHD’s second-best recommendation) during the practice narrative may not be beneficial to the substantive phase of the interview. In the current study, all practice narratives were conducted following the NICHD Interviewing Protocol, but the topic of the practice narrative varied.

It is also important to determine an appropriate length of time for a practice narrative. Having a practice narrative that is too short may not have any beneficial effects, whereas having a practice narrative that lasts too long may be a waste of
investigative resources and an exhausting endeavour for the child. In prior work evaluating the utility of practice narratives, no attempt was made to control the length of time spent practicing so the time varied between interviews (Brubacher et al., 2011; Price et al., 2013). This variability in duration may be due to children’s individual differences, specifically related to younger children’s more limited attention span capabilities (Ruff & Lawson, 1990) or widely variable verbal skills (Lamb et al., 1994). A systematic manipulation of the length of time spent in the practice narrative phase of the interview is needed. In the current study, the length of time that the interviewer and the child spent discussing the practice narrative topic was manipulated (2 minutes vs. 5 minutes) to determine whether the duration of the practice impacted the substantive phase of the interview. Given that investigators have previously voiced concern about the additional time required to complete a practice narrative, the first step in providing a detailed recommendation is to determine whether or not a relatively brief practice narrative (2-5 minutes) is able to improve a child’s performance in the substantive phase of the interview.

**Hypotheses**

The goal of a practice narrative is to improve the overall quantity and quality of the information obtained during the substantive phase. For the current study, the dependent variables of interest were (1) the total number of details reported by the child in the substantive phase, (2) the number of details reported by the child in response to the initial prompt in the substantive phase, (3) the proportion of episodic language used by the child in the substantive phase, and (4) the accuracy of the child’s report in the substantive and cued recall phases of the interview. For this study, a *more desirable*
**overall interview** was defined as one in which, during the substantive phase, there was a larger number of details reported, a higher proportion of episodic language used, and a higher number of critical details reported (i.e., a higher accuracy score). There were four general hypotheses: (1) that conducting any type of practice narrative would result in a more desirable overall interview compared to not conducting a practice narrative; (2) that discussing a unique event during the practice narrative would result in a more desirable overall interview compared to discussing a commonplace event during the practice narrative; and, (3) that a longer practice narrative (5 minutes) would result in a more desirable overall interview compared to a shorter practice narrative (2 minutes).

It was unclear whether or not an interaction between practice narrative topic and practice narrative time would occur. If this did occur, it was anticipated that having a longer time (5 minutes) to participate in the recommended version of the practice narrative (the unique event topic) would be more beneficial in terms of detail reporting, episodic language use, and accuracy than having less time (2 minutes) to participate in the recommended version of the practice narrative (the unique event). Likewise, it was anticipated that having a longer time to participate in the recommended version of the practice narrative (the unique event topic) would be more beneficial in terms of detail reporting, episodic language use, and accuracy than having less time (2 minutes) or as much time (5 minutes) to participate in the secondary recommendation for the practice narrative (the commonplace event topic). The final hypothesis (4) was that one *optimal* practice narrative condition (i.e., a longer-unique practice narrative) would result in a more desirable overall interview compared to the other *suboptimal* combinations of
practice narrative conditions (i.e., a shorter-unique practice narrative, or a shorter-
commonplace practice narrative, or a longer-commonplace practice narrative).

Method

Design

In the current study a 2 (topic: unique event vs. commonplace event) x 2 (time: 2
min vs. 5 min) experimental design was implemented; a control condition (no practice
narrative) was also included. Prior to the interview, children were pseudo-randomly
assigned by age to one of the five possible experimental conditions (see Table 1). For
some children, there was no practice narrative included in their interview \( (n = 36) \). For
other children, the time of the practice narrative was monitored by the interviewer and
was either approximately two minutes long (i.e., short condition; \( M = 2:19, SD = 0:27; n =
76 \)) or approximately five minutes long (i.e., long condition; \( M = 4:57, SD = 0:55; n =
65 \)). During the practice narrative phase of the interview, children were asked about a
unique event (e.g., a recent birthday party; \( n = 72 \)) or about a commonplace event (e.g.,
last night’s activities; \( n = 69 \)). Children’s accuracy, language use and the number of
details reported during the substantive or free-recall phase of the interview served as the
primary dependent variables of interest.
Table 1. Number of Children in Each Experimental Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Unique</th>
<th>Common</th>
<th>No practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 min</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 min</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants

One hundred and eighty eight children (53 females) between the ages of six and ten years \((M = 8.30, SD = 1.20)\) were recruited from a one week long summer science camp. Written consent from the children’s parent(s) or guardian(s) was obtained on the first day of the summer camp prior to any interaction with the children. Verbal assent was obtained from the children on the third or fourth day of the summer camp prior to the interview portion of the experiment (i.e., interviewers asked each child participant if they were okay answering questions and went over the *ground rules* of the interview). All children attending the camp who fit the desired age range (six to ten years old) took part in a magic show in small groups (15 – 20 children). However, only the children with parental consent were invited to participate in the interviews one to two days after the magic show. The relatively short delay was necessary because children only attended the summer camp for one week and the interviews with the participating children had to be scheduled around other camp activities. To avoid rehearsal effects, the children were not told that they would be participating in an interview and the program instructors and parent(s) or guardian(s) were asked to avoid talking about the magic show with the children. Three children who had parental consent chose not to participate in the interview portion of the study. Seven interviews were excluded from analysis because the interviewer was unable to engage the child in the assigned practice narrative condition, resulting in a final sample of 177 children.

One child was an outlier in terms of the total number of details provide in the substantive phase and was excluded from further data analysis. This child provided 627 details in the substantive phase, which was the most details of any child and 131 details
more than the total number of details provided by the second most informative child within the same condition. The average number of total details across all conditions was 211.80 ($SD = 120.45$).

**Play Session**

Children participated in a highly scripted 20 minute play session with a trained research assistant acting as the play facilitator. The scripted play session was in the theme of a magic show (Activity TV, 2012). The magic show consisted of 25 unique details which were used to determine the accuracy of the child’s report (see Appendix A). For example, the play facilitator played the role of the magician and wore a magic wizard’s hat (i.e., pointed hat with stars on it) while performing different magic tricks. The play facilitator said the name of each trick three times and demonstrated to the children how to perform the magic trick. The play facilitator’s attire, the name of the magic tricks, as well as the details from the magic tricks served as the verifiable details. Additionally, towards the end of the magic show, a male confederate was invited by the magician to assist with a magic trick and handled the magician’s magic wand. While the magician’s back was turned, the male confederate left the room with the magic wand in his back pocket.

**Interviewer Training**

Interviewers were trained to follow the NICHD Interviewing Protocol (Lamb et al., 2007) for both the practice narrative and substantive phases of the interviews. Nine female University of Regina research assistants took part in a three-hour training session.

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1 Using Tukey’s (1977) liberal boxplot method, this participant is considered an outlier with respect to the overall group. Using Hoaglin and Iglewicz’s (1987) more conservative approach, this participant is considered an outlier within their own group, but falls just below the upper limit of the overall group.

2 The confederate removing the magic wand served as the main event for another experiment in which the children were asked to identify the confederate in a photo line-up.
one week prior to interviewing the children. This training session included a step-by-step breakdown of the Interviewing Protocol as well as time to practice the interviewing methods. Specifically, interviewers were taught to rely on open-ended prompts and to refrain from asking yes/no, option posing, or suggestive questions throughout the duration of the interview. Previous research suggests that post-training refresher courses and providing feedback in between interviews is essential for interviewer adherence (Powell, Fisher, & Hughes-Scholes, 2008; Price & Roberts, 2011). Therefore, throughout data collection the interviewers were given verbal feedback on their interviews and monitored to ensure that they were conducting the interviews properly (i.e., following the study conditions). After two weeks of interviewing, each interviewer received detailed written feedback regarding the first interview she conducted, and the most recent interview she had conducted. This feedback highlighted errors in the interviewers’ prompt types (e.g., pointed out closed/focused prompts) and gave personalized tips for improving interviewing skills (e.g., providing examples of how to phrase the prompts).

**Interview**

Children were either interviewed one or two days following the magic show (depending upon camp scheduling). All interviews were audio recorded, and consisted of five possible phases: (1) introduction and rapport building, (2) practice narrative, (3) substantive phase, (4) cued questions, and (5) debriefing (see Appendix B).

All of the interviews began with a basic introduction and rapport building as outlined in Lamb et al. (2007; 2011). The interviewer always started by introducing herself and reviewing the NICHD Interviewing Protocols’ *ground rules* for interviews with children. The interviewer explained that: (1) the child does not have to answer any
question they do not want to answer, (2) the child can end the interview at any point without explanation, (3) the child can and should respond with “I do not know” to a question that they were unsure about, (4) the child should correct the interviewer if the interviewer says something that is incorrect, (5) the child should ask for clarification if the interviewer says something that the child does not understand, and finally, (6) the child should only talk about things that are true, or things that really happened. The next part of the interview consisted of rapport building between the child and the interviewer. In this section, the interviewer asked the child to talk about what the child likes to do for fun or during their spare time.

Depending on the experimental condition the child was assigned to, the interviewer either conducted a practice narrative with the child, or moved on to the substantive phase of the interview. In both the practice narrative and the substantive phase of the interview, the interviewer was taught to use episodic language and rely on open-ended prompts. The interviewer determined the practice narrative topic based on the experimental condition that the child had been assigned to. In both the unique event practice narrative topic condition and the commonplace event practice narrative topic condition the goal was to have the child completely describe an event from beginning to end. In the unique event practice narrative topic condition the interviewer attempted to identify a unique and memorable recent event as the topic of discussion (e.g., birthday party, family vacation). In the commonplace event practice narrative topic condition the interviewer attempted to have the child describe the preceding day’s activities as the topic of discussion (e.g., everything that occurred the previous night). If the child had been assigned to the unique event practice narrative topic condition, the interviewer asked the
child if something fun or special had happened lately and identified an appropriate topic based on the child’s response. If the child had been assigned to the commonplace event practice narrative topic condition, the interviewer asked the child to give a full description of everything that had occurred on the previous evening or during the morning prior to the child arriving at the summer camp.

It was important that the practice narrative topic and the substantive topic did not overlap. The interviewers were instructed to avoid discussing summer camp activities in order to avoid unintentionally discussing the magic show (i.e., substantive issue) in the practice narrative phase of the interview. For the commonplace event practice narrative topic condition, the interviewer always asked the child to describe everything he or she did before or after summer camp to avoid this potential problem. For the unique event practice narrative topic condition avoiding discussing summer camp activities was more difficult. This was because some of the summer science camp activities were particularly unique and memorable for the children (e.g., dissecting a starfish in the lab) which made them suitable topics for discussion in the unique practice narrative topic condition. Therefore, if no other unique topic was seemingly available to discuss, the child was permitted to talk about an activity from summer camp. In the end, none of the children spontaneously brought up the magic show or attempted to discuss any details related to the magic show during the practice narrative.

Once it was time to discuss the magic show (i.e., the substantive phase of the interview) the interviewer said that she heard that there was a magician that came to the summer camp and that she was interested in knowing all about what happened while the magician was there. The interviewer then asked a series of open-ended prompts and used
facilitators (e.g., “That’s interesting”) to obtain details from the child about the magic show (see Appendix B). Once the child was unable to provide any more information about the magic show in response to open-ended prompts (i.e., free-recall), the interviewer was instructed to move on to the cued recall questions (see Appendix C).

The cued recall section was comprised of 10 highly scripted questions and was administered in the same way across all participants. The last four questions in this section were repeated up to five times to get a full description of each of the tricks the child remembered (e.g., “What happened in the first trick?”, “What happened in the second trick?” see Appendix C). These cued questions were designed to be as open-ended as possible in order to parallel the format of the NICHD Interviewing Protocol throughout the entire interview (i.e., the cued questions were not suggestive or leading in any way). The cued recall section was included in the study as an additional measure of accuracy. For example, children might not spontaneously report some of the details deemed “critical” by the researchers in the determination of accuracy, but they may be more likely to report these details when cued to do so (e.g., cued question #3: “What was the magician wearing?” critical details: a wizard’s hat and a cape). Such a measure allows for an examination of the experimental manipulations on memory accuracy, in addition to completeness of recall. The interview ended once the interviewer had gone through the entire list of cued questions. The interviewer then thanked the child for his or her time and for helping her to understand what happened the day the magician came. All children were then given a coloured gel pen as a thank-you gift for participating in the study.

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3 The NICHD Interviewing Protocol does not include a cued recall section because the truth of the event is unknown in actual forensic interviews, and cued questions can be potentially leading or suggestive.
Coding

The practice narrative section and the substantive sections were coded for interviewer utterance types, child details, interviewer language, child language, and the child’s accuracy (as per Lamb et al., 1996; Price & Roberts, 2011; Price et al., 2013; Schneider et al., 2011). Interrater reliability was obtained on 30 randomly selected interviews. According to Cicchetti and Sparrow (1981), an agreement level of .75 or higher is considered excellent. The intraclass correlation coefficient agreement was therefore excellent ranging from .80 to .98 for categorizing interviewer utterances, child details, interviewer language, child language, and accuracy.

Interviewer utterances. As with previous research in this area, all interviewer utterances were categorized as either (1) an invitation, (2) a cued-invitation, (3) a directed narrative, (4) a paraphrase, (5) a directed specific (6) a yes/no, (7) an option-posing, (8) a suggestive, or (9) a facilitator (Lamb et al., 2003). Each time an exchange between the child and the interviewer occurred, the interviewer’s utterance would be coded. If the interviewer posed multiple prompts within one turn (i.e., before the child responded), only the final prompt was coded because children typically respond to the most recent prompt (Katz & Hershkowitz, 2012). Invitations are interviewer utterances that invite the child to discuss the overall event without the interviewer implying what should be discussed (e.g., “Tell me more.”). Cued-invitations are interviewer utterances that invite the child to talk more about something that they have already mentioned (e.g., “Tell me more about the second trick you mentioned.”). Directed narratives are interviewer utterances that require the child to respond in a narrative format and target topics that have not been brought up by the child (e.g., “Tell me more about the magician.”).
Paraphrases are interviewer utterances that repeat or summarize what the child has previously said (e.g., “You said she did a trick with a string and a straw.”). Directed specifics are interviewer utterances that can be answered in a few words and target topics that have not been brought up by the child (e.g., “How many tricks did the magician show you?”). Yes/no questions are interviewer utterances that require the child to answer with either a yes or a no (e.g., “Did she tell you how to do that trick?”). To provide a conservative coding of interviewer utterance type, prompts that were intended to be invitations but were actually phrased as yes/no questions, and therefore could be responded to with a yes or a no, were coded as a yes/no question (e.g., “I was wondering if you could tell me about ____” or “Can you tell me everything that happened?”).

Option-posing questions are interviewer utterances that ask the child to choose between two or more options provided by the interviewer (e.g., “Was this before or after the magician came?”). Suggestive prompts or questions are interviewer utterances that either contain information not mentioned by the child, or the utterance leads the child to a particular response (e.g., “Tell me everything that happened when she was here” [when the child had not mentioned that the magician was female] or “She showed you how to do the tricks, didn’t she?”). Facilitators are responsive utterances that encourage the child to provide more detail (e.g., “Mmhmm” or “You’re doing a great job”). Instructional or transitional statements were coded as facilitators (e.g., “You have to talk louder so the recorder can hear you.” or “Now I want to talk about the day the magician came to your summer camp.”).

The nine categories were then broken down into open-ended prompts (invitations, cued-invitations, directed narratives, and paraphrases) and closed-ended prompts.
(directed specifics, yes/no, option-posing, and suggestive). The total number and the proportion of open-ended prompts, and the total number and proportion of closed-ended prompts were calculated separately for the practice narrative and the substantive sections.

**Child details.** A *detail* is defined as any complete subject, object, verb, preposition, adjective, or any other grammatical structure that provides extra information (see Lamb et al., 1996; Sternberg et al., 1996). To be counted as a detail, the word(s) had to provide meaning or clarity. Unclear statements, repeated information, or stylistic patterns of speech (e.g., “like”) were not coded as details. The total number of details reported by the child in the practice narrative and the substantive phase of the interview were calculated separately. The number of details reported in response to the various interviewer utterances was calculated (Lamb et al., 2003). Details that followed facilitators (e.g., “mmhmm”) were considered to be in response to the preceding utterance (e.g., invitation, cued-invitation, directed narrative). From this, the proportion of details in response to open-ended prompts, and the proportion of details in response to closed-ended prompts were calculated separately for the practice narrative and the substantive sections.

The number of details the child provided in response to the first interviewer prompt in the substantive phase of the interview was also calculated (i.e., number of details in response to the first request for the child to give a full account of the witnessed event; Roberts et al., 2004). This first request for information in the substantive phase is thought to be generally free from interviewer influence, and as a result, it is hypothesized that children in the field are more likely to respond accurately to this prompt (Sternberg et al., 1997). Lamb et al. (2007) refer to this as the *first free-recall open-ended*
substantive prompt and argue that including a practice narrative prior to the substantive phase would result in children reporting more details in response to this initial prompt.

**Interviewer language.** All interviewer utterances were individually categorized as either episodic or generic. The interviewer’s utterance was considered *episodic* if the prompt or question was about a specific event or aspects of the event (e.g., “Tell me everything that happened when you were in Disneyland.” or “Tell me more about the first trick the magician did.”). The interviewer’s utterance was considered *generic* if the prompt or question was vague, was asking about general routines, or was asking about the general nature of events (e.g., “What do you usually do after you get home from summer camp?”). The total number of episodic utterances and generic utterances posed by the interviewer were calculated separately for the practice narrative and the substantive phase of the interview.

**Child language.** Each child detail was categorized as episodic, generic, factual, or miscellaneous. A child detail was considered *episodic* if the response contained information about a particular event or aspects of a particular event (e.g., “We saw Mickey Mouse on our first day in Disneyland” or “For the first trick, she put a ketchup pack in a water bottle”). A child detail was considered *generic* if the response contained information about general actions, routines, or background information about the child (e.g., “I like playing hockey” or “What you do is you put the ketchup pack in the water bottle.”). A child detail was considered *factual* if it contained information about the immediate present (e.g., “The bathroom is right around the corner”). A child detail was considered *miscellaneous* if it did not fit into the other three categories. The total number of episodic details reported and the total number of generic details reported by the child
were calculated separately for the practice narrative and the substantive phase of the interview. Fewer than 2% of all child details were coded as either factual or as miscellaneous, thus analyses of these details were not conducted.

**Accuracy.** Twenty-five critical details were identified in the highly scripted magic show (see Appendix A). Each of the twenty-five critical details counted as one point. Half points on critical details were granted in some situations. For example, if the child said “The trick was called Laundry something”, they received 0.5 points for the critical detail of the third trick’s name (i.e., *Dirty Laundry*). The child’s accuracy score for the substantive phase of the interview and the cued recall phase of the interview were calculated and analysed separately.

**Practice Narrative Time**

The interviewer was responsible for timing the length of the practice narrative. Practice narratives did not always have a clear start or end point. For example, some children took longer than others to identify an appropriate topic to discuss and some children would continue to discuss the details of the event even after the interviewer made an attempt to transition to the substantive phase. During training, the interviewers were instructed not to stop the practice narrative abruptly if the child was in the middle of a narrative. Ending the practice narrative abruptly for the purpose of an exact time would have been counterproductive to the purpose of the practice narrative, which again, is to practice children in reporting details of an event in an uninterrupted narrative format. Instead, the interviewer was instructed to wait until a natural stopping point and then move on to discuss the substantive issue. Many of the interviewers reported that it was quite difficult to keep track of time while simultaneously attempting to conduct a proper
practice narrative. For these reasons, the timings of the practice narratives within each condition varied somewhat.

The recorded audio files were used to determine the length of time of each practice narrative. The practice narrative was determined to begin with the first prompt or transition to the practice narrative topic (e.g., “Now I want to talk about something fun or exciting that has happened to you lately.”) and end once the interviewer transitioned to the substantive phase of the interview (e.g., “Now I want to talk about the magician that came the other day.”). For the short practice narrative condition (i.e., 2 minutes) the time of the practice narrative ranged from 1:00 to 3:30, with an average time of 2:19 ($SD = 0:27$). For the long practice narrative condition (i.e., 5 minutes) the time of the practice narrative ranged from 3:22 to 8:28, with an average time of 4:57 ($SD = 0:55$). Despite attempting to control the length of time the interviewer and the child spent discussing the practice narrative, some of the short practice narratives ($n = 5$) and some of the long practice narratives ($n = 12$) overlapped in duration (i.e., were between 3:00 and 3:59). These cases were not excluded from further analysis because the findings of this study did not change based on whether or not these cases were included.

Price et al. (2013) found that forensic interviews that contained a practice narrative were longer than interviews that did not contain a practice narrative. This finding was also observed in the current study. On average, interviews that did not contain a practice narrative were 15:27 ($SD = 4:13$) long. For interviews that did contained a practice narrative, the average length of time of the entire interview (including the practice narrative) was 18:15 ($SD = 4:28$) for interviews that contained a two minute practice narrative, and 20:36 ($SD = 3:51$) for interviews that contained a five
minute practice narrative. Independent samples t-tests were used to determine whether the total length of the interview varied based on the practice narrative time condition. Not having a practice narrative ($M = 15:27, SD = 4:13$) resulted in a shorter interview overall compared to both having a shorter practice narrative ($M = 18:15, SD = 4:28; t(111) = 3.18, p = .002$) and having a longer practice narrative ($M = 20:36, SD = 3:51; t(100) = 6.25, p < .001$). Likewise, having a shorter practice narrative ($M = 18:15, SD = 4:28$) resulted in a shorter interview overall compared to having a longer practice narrative ($M = 20:36, SD = 3:51; t(139) = 3.29, p = .001$)

**Practice Narrative Topic**

In the unique event practice narrative, the children identified a number of different events to discuss. The topics discussed were categorized in order to get a sense of the types of topics children elect to discuss during the recommended version of the practice narrative. The most common topic category that was discussed in the unique event practice narrative topic condition was a past trip or vacation that the child had been on with their family (e.g., Disneyland, road trip, camping; 36%). Other topics of discussion were: memorable summer camp activities (e.g., dissecting a starfish; 15%), celebrations or parties (e.g., birthday party, wedding 15%), acquiring a new toy (8%), and sporting events (e.g., scoring a goal; 8%). Some of the topics discussed (11%) were completely distinct and not easily categorized (e.g., breaking a piñata, moving to Canada). Some children chose to discuss something exciting about a video game they had played, a book they had read, or a movie they had watched (6%).

In the commonplace event practice narrative topic condition, the topics discussed by the children could be broken down into two categories. The children either discussed
the events that took place the previous evening or that morning (80%) or they discussed routine activities they engage in (e.g., what they normally do in the evening; 20%). The goal of the commonplace event practice narrative topic condition was to have the child provide a full description of the events that occurred the previous evening or a full description of the events that occurred during the morning prior to arriving at the summer camp. However, during coding of the data it became apparent that the conversation sometimes switched to discussing routine evening and/or routine morning events. Given this situation, further analyses of the language used by the interviewer and by the child were conducted for this condition and are discussed in the results section.

**Results**

**Practice Narrative vs. No Practice Narrative**

It was hypothesised that conducting any type of practice narrative would result in a more desirable overall interview compared to not conducting a practice narrative. To test this, independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare interviews that did not contain a practice narrative to interviews that contained any type of practice narrative. If having a practice narrative is beneficial to the overall quality of the interview, it is expected that the children that participated in a practice narrative would be more informative, use more episodic language, and provide more accurate details in the substantive phase of the interview compared to children that did not participate in a practice narrative.

**Details.** There was a significant effect of having a practice narrative on the total number of details reported by the child in the substantive phase, $t(175) = 2.14, p = .03, r^2 = .03$. Children that did not participate in a practice narrative reported fewer details
overall in the later substantive phase of the interview ($M = 172.64, SD = 100.40$) compared to children that participated in any type of practice narrative ($M = 218.86, SD = 118.93$). There was also a significant effect of having a practice narrative on the number of details reported by the child in response to the first prompt posed by the interviewer in the substantive phase, $t(175) = 2.80, p = .01, r^2 = .04$. Children that did not participate in a practice narrative reported fewer details in response to the initial prompt in the substantive phase of the interview ($M = 53.06, SD = 54.89$), compared to children that participated in any type of practice narrative ($M = 101.87, SD = 100.67$).

**Language.** There was no significant effect of having a practice narrative on the proportion of episodic details reported by the child in the substantive phase of the interview, $t(175) = .86, p = .39, r^2 = .004$. This null effect was likely a result of the very high proportion of episodic details reported in the substantive phase of the interview for both children that participated in a practice narrative ($M = .89, SD = .18$) and those that did not ($M = .92, SD = .14$).

**Accuracy.** Two accuracy scores were assessed to determine accuracy: the child’s accuracy score during the substantive phase of the interview and the child’s accuracy score during the cued recall section. The effect of the practice narrative on the child’s accuracy during the substantive phase did not reach statistical significance, $t(175) = 1.92, p = .06, r^2 = .02$. However, the children that participated in a practice narrative ($M = 11.31, SD = 4.00$) tended to report more accurate details during the substantive phase than children that did not participate in a practice narrative ($M = 9.85, SD = 4.31$). The same pattern was observed on accuracy rates in the cued recall section, and this difference was found to be statistically significant, $t(175) = 2.49, p = .01, r^2 = .03$. 
Children that participated in any type of practice narrative ($M = 15.12, SD = 3.88$) reported more accurate details during the cued recall than children that did not participate in a practice narrative ($M = 13.30, SD = 4.05$).

**Summary.** These results suggest that practice narratives do have beneficial effects on the substantive phase of the interview. Compared to the children that did not participate in a practice narrative, children that participated in any type of practice narrative reported more details throughout the substantive phase, more details in response to the initial prompt for information, and more accurate details in response to the cued recall questions. Children who participated in any type of practice narrative also tended to report more accurate details throughout the substantive phase compared to children that did not participate in a practice narrative, but this difference was not statistically significant.

**Practice Narrative Topic: Unique vs. Commonplace vs. No Practice**

It was hypothesized that discussing a unique event during the practice narrative would result in a more desirable overall interview compared to discussing a commonplace event during the practice narrative. If participating in a unique event practice narrative is beneficial to the overall quality of the interview, then it is expected that practicing discussing a unique event would lead children to be more informative, use more desirable language, and provide more accurate details in the substantive phase of the interview, compared to children that practiced discussing a commonplace event during the practice narrative. To test this, a one-way between subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the effect of the practice narrative on the
substantive phase of the interview in the unique topic, the commonplace topic, and the no practice narrative conditions.

**Details.** The total number of details reported in the substantive phase did not quite reach significance, $F(2, 174) = 2.71, p = .07, \eta^2_p = .03$, but the number of details in response to the initial prompt did significantly differ across topic, $F(2, 174) = 7.07, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .08$ (see Figure 1). Tukey’s HSD post-hoc tests indicated that children that practiced discussing a unique event reported more details in response to the initial prompt in the substantive phase ($M = 120.56, SD = 113.12$) compared to children that did not participate in a practice narrative ($M = 53.06, SD = 54.89; p = .001$), and compared to children that practiced discussing a commonplace event ($M = 82.36, SD = 82.14; p = .04$). Interestingly, the post-hoc tests did not reveal a statistically significant difference between the commonplace event practice narrative condition ($M = 82.36, SD = 82.14$) and the no practice narrative condition ($M = 53.06, SD = 54.89; p = .27$).
Fig. 1. Mean number of details (standard errors) provided by children in response to the initial prompt in the substantive phase in relation to the topic discussed during the practice narrative.
**Language.** There was no effect of practice narrative topic (unique vs. common) on the proportion of episodic responses by children in the substantive phase of the interview, $F(2, 174) = 0.41, p = .66, \eta^2_p = .01$. The proportion of episodic details reported in the substantive phase of the interview was higher for children that practiced discussing a unique event ($M = .89, SD = .19$), than children that practiced discussing a commonplace event ($M = .90, SD = .18$), and children that did not participate in a practice narrative ($M = .92, SD = .14$).

**Accuracy.** The accuracy score for the substantive phase was not significantly different across conditions, $F(2, 174) = 2.11, p = .12, \eta^2_p = .02$, but the accuracy score for the cued recall phase did significantly differ across topic conditions, $F(2, 174) = 3.15, p = .05, \eta^2_p = .04$ (see Figure 2). Tukey HSD post-hoc tests indicated that children that participated in a unique event practice narrative provided more accurate details in the cued recall phase ($M = 15.24, SD = 3.32$) than children that did not participate in a practice narrative ($M = 13.30, SD = 4.05; p = .04$). Children that participated in a commonplace practice narrative ($M = 14.99, SD = 4.42$) tended to provide more accurate details in the cued recall phase than children that did not participate in a practice narrative ($M = 13.30, SD = 4.05$); however, this difference was not statistically significant ($p = .09$). Finally, children that participated in a unique event practice narrative provided no more accurate details in the cued recall phase ($M = 15.24, SD = 3.32$) than children that participated in a commonplace practice narrative ($M = 14.99, SD = 4.42; p = .93$).
Figure 2: Cued Recall Accuracy & Practice Narrative Topic

Fig. 2. Mean accuracy score in the cued recall phase (standard errors) in relation to the topic discussed during the practice narrative.
Summary. These results suggest that the topic discussed during the practice narrative influences the substantive phase of the interview. Specifically, children that discussed a unique event during the practice narrative reported more details in response to the initial prompt for information in the substantive phase of the interview, compared to children that discussed a commonplace event during the practice narrative. Interestingly, there was no difference between the children that participated in a unique practice narrative and children that participated in a commonplace practice narrative in terms of the number of accurate details reported in either the substantive phase or the cued recall phase.

Practice Narrative Time: Long vs. Short vs. No Practice

It was hypothesized that conducting a longer (5 minute) practice narrative would result in a more desirable overall interview compared to conducting a shorter (2 minute) practice narrative. To test this, a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of the practice narrative on the substantive phase of the interview in the five minute, the two minute, and the no practice narrative conditions.

Details. The total number of details reported in the substantive phase did not differ by condition, $F(2, 174) = 2.32, p = .10, \eta_p^2 = .03$; however, the number of details in response to the initial prompt did significantly differ, $F(2, 174) = 4.86, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .05$ (see Figure 3). Tukey HSD post-hoc tests indicated that children that practiced for a longer time (5 minutes) reported more details in response to the initial prompt in the substantive phase ($M = 113.34, SD = 114.91$) than children that did not participate in a practice narrative ($M = 53.06, SD = 54.89; p = .01$). Children that participated in a shorter practice narrative (2 minutes) tended to report more details in response to the initial
prompt in the substantive phase ($M = 92.05, SD = 86.24$) compared to children that did not participate in a practice narrative ($M = 53.06, SD = 54.89$); however, this difference was not statistically significant ($p = .10$). Interestingly, the post-hoc tests did not reveal a significant difference between the longer practice narrative condition ($M = 113.34, SD = 114.91$) and the shorter practice narrative condition ($M = 92.05, SD = 86.24$), $p = .37$. 
Figure 3: First Prompt Details & Practice Narrative Time

Fig. 3. Mean number of details (standard errors) provided by children in response to the initial prompt in the substantive phase in relation to the length of time spent discussing the practice narrative.
Language. There was no effect of practice narrative time (long vs. short) on the proportion of episodic responses by children in the substantive phase of the interview, $F(2, 174) = 0.91, p = .41, \eta^2 = .01$. The proportion of episodic details reported in the substantive phase of the interview was high for children that practiced for a longer time ($M = .91, SD = .16$), children that practiced for a shorter time ($M = .88, SD = .20$), and children that did not practice ($M = .92, SD = .14$).

Accuracy. The accuracy score for the substantive phase did not differ by condition, $F(2, 174) = 2.26, p = .11, \eta^2 = .03$; however, the accuracy score for the cued recall phase did significantly differ, $F(2, 174) = 3.09, p = .05, \eta^2 = .03$ (see Figure 4). Tukey HSD post-hoc tests indicated that children that practiced for a shorter duration provided more accurate details in the cued recall phase ($M = 15.16, SD = 4.02$) than the children that did not participate in a practice narrative ($M = 13.30, SD = 4.05; p = .05$). Children that practiced for a longer duration tended to provide more accurate details in the cued recall phase ($M = 15.07, SD = 3.75$), compared to children that did not participate in a practice narrative ($M = 13.30, SD = 4.05$); however, this difference was not statistically significant ($p = .08$). The post-hoc tests did not reveal a significant difference between the longer and shorter practice narrative conditions, $p = .99$. 
Fig. 4. Mean accuracy score in the cued recall phase (standard errors) in relation to the length of time spent discussing the practice narrative.
Summary. The results suggest that the time spent conducting the practice narrative does not significantly affect the substantive phase of the interview. Children that practiced for a longer time did not report significantly more correct details nor did they report significantly more details in response to the initial prompt than children that practiced for a shorter time. Comparisons between the children that did not participate in a practice narrative and those that participated in a practice narrative for a short or longer duration were mixed. Compared to the children that did not practice, children that practiced for longer reported more details in response to the initial prompt; whereas children that practiced for a shorter duration reported more correct details in the cued recall phase compared to children that did not practice.

Optimal Practice Narrative vs. Suboptimal Practice Narratives

It was hypothesized that the optimal practice narrative condition (i.e., a longer-unique practice narrative) would result in a more desirable overall interview compared to the other suboptimal combinations of practice narrative conditions (i.e., a shorter-unique practice narrative, or a shorter-commonplace practice narrative, or a longer-commonplace practice narrative). To test this a 2 (topic: unique vs. commonplace) by 2 (time: 5 min vs. 2 min) between subjects factorial ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were any differences between groups in terms of the number of details, the language used, or accuracy in the substantive phase.

Details. There was no interaction between practice narrative topic and practice narrative time in terms of the total number of details reported in the substantive phase, $F(1, 137) = 0.32, p = .58, \eta^2_p = .002$. The interaction between practice narrative topic and practice narrative time was not quite statistically significant in terms of the number of
details in response to the initial prompt in the substantive phase, $F(1, 137) = 3.41, p = .07, \eta^2_p = .02$. It was hypothesized that having a child practice discussing a unique event for a longer duration may be more beneficial to the child’s informativeness than other combinations of practice narrative time and practice narrative topic. To explore this possibility Dunnett t-tests were computed post-hoc to compare the different practice narrative time and topic conditions (i.e., long-unique/optimal vs. short-common vs. long-common vs. short-unique) in terms of the number of details in response to the initial prompt the substantive phase (see Figure 5). Children who participated in the optimal version of the practice narrative (i.e., a unique topic discussed for 5 minutes; $M = 149.84, SD = 132.50$) provided more details in response to the initial prompt than children who participated in the short-commonplace practice narrative ($M = 86.42, SD = 82.93; p = .02$) and the children who participated in the long-commonplace practice narrative ($M = 77.94, SD = 82.33; p = .01$). Children that participated in the optimal version of the practice narrative tended to report more details in response to the initial prompt ($M = 149.84, SD = 132.50$) compared to children in the short-unique practice narrative condition ($M = 97.13, SD = 89.86$); however, this difference did not reach statistical significance ($p = .06$). No other comparisons were significant ($p \geq .74$).
Figure 5: First Prompt Details & Optimal vs. Suboptimal Practice Narratives

Fig. 5. Mean number of details (standard errors) provided by children in response to the initial prompt in the substantive phase in relation to the optimal (long-unique) and suboptimal (short-unique, long-common, and short-common) practice narrative conditions.
Language. There was no interaction between practice narrative topic and practice narrative time in terms of the total number of details reported in the substantive phase, $F(1, 137) = 2.65, p = .11, \eta^2_p = .02$. The proportion of episodic details reported in the substantive phase of the interview was high for all children that participated in a practice narrative. None of the post-hoc Dunnett t-tests comparing the optimal practice narrative (long-unique, $M = .93$, $SD = .10$) to the suboptimal practice narrative combinations (short-commonplace, $M = .91$, $SD = .15$; long-commonplace, $M = .89$, $SD = .21$; short-unique, $M = .85$, $SD = .23$) were significant ($p \geq .16$).

Accuracy. There was no interaction between practice narrative topic and practice narrative time for the accuracy score in the substantive phase, $F(1, 137) = .75, p = .39, \eta^2_p = .01$, or the accuracy score in the cued recall phase, $F(1, 137) = .02, p = .88, \eta^2_p < .001$. Dunnett t-tests were conducted post-hoc to compare the optimal practice narrative condition (long-unique) to the suboptimal practice narrative conditions (short-commonplace, long-commonplace, and short-unique). However, none of the post-hoc tests comparing the optimal practice narrative (long-unique, $M = 11.54$, $SD = 3.84$) to the suboptimal practice narrative combinations (short-commonplace, $M = 11.63$, $SD = 4.10$; long-commonplace, $M = 10.43$, $SD = 4.11$; short-unique, $M = 11.57$, $SD = 3.98$) were significant ($p \geq .54$) in terms of accuracy in the substantive phase. Likewise, none of the post-hoc tests comparing the optimal practice narrative (long-unique, $M = 15.25$, $SD = 3.07$) to the suboptimal practice narrative combinations (short-commonplace, $M = 15.08$, $SD = 4.54$; long-commonplace, $M = 14.90$, $SD = 4.34$; short-unique, $M = 15.23$, $SD = 3.54$) were significant ($p \geq .97$) in terms of accuracy in the cued recall phase.
Summary. Children who participated in the optimal version of the practice narrative (unique topic discussed for 5 minutes) reported more details in response to the initial prompt compared to children that participated in the commonplace practice narrative for either two or five minutes. Children in the optimal version also tended to report more information in response to the initial prompt compared to children that practiced discussing a unique event for a shorter time, but this difference was not statistically significant.

Interviewer Adherence to Interviewing Protocol

It was determined that the interviewers were able to closely follow the NICHD Interviewing Protocol. All interviews contained a rapport building phase and a discussion of the ground rules for the interview. The interviewers adhered to the Interviewing Protocol in terms of the types of prompts they posed during all phases of the interview. On average, a larger proportion of the interviewers’ prompts were open-ended rather than closed-ended in the practice narrative section of the interview ($M = .80, SD = .22$) and in the substantive phase of the interview ($M = .83, SD = .20$). The interviewers also adhered to the Interviewing Protocol in terms of the language used during all phases of the interview. On average, a larger proportion of the interviewers’ prompts were episodic rather than generic in the practice narrative section of the interview ($M = .76, SD = .35$) and in the substantive phase of the interview ($M = .997, SD = .02$).

The overall level of adherence to the Interviewing Protocol observed is quite high compared to the level of adherence normally observed in the field. For example, Lamb et al. (1996) found that only 50% of the interviewers’ prompts were open-ended (i.e., invitations or directed narratives) and Schneider et al. (2011) found that the language
used by the interviewers was more often generic than episodic. In the present study, high interviewer adherence can likely be attributed to the experimental situation. Unlike interviewers in the field, these interviewers were able to practice the exact appropriate prompts and language specific to the unchanging magic show topic. In this way they were, for the most part, able to avoid closed-ended or generic prompts and maximize the number of episodic, open-ended prompts regarding the magic show.

Feedback. Interviewers were able to ask questions of the trainer in between each of their interviews and were provided with informal feedback throughout data collection. Two weeks into data collection, after each interviewer had conducted at least two interviews on separate occasions, interviewers were provided with personalized, written feedback on the first interview they had conducted and on the most recent interview they had conducted. Paired samples t-tests were used to compare the interviewers’ pre-feedback interviews \((n = 64)\) to the interviewers’ post-feedback interviews \((n = 111)\) in terms of the mean proportion of open-ended prompts posed and the mean proportion of episodic language used across all interviews conducted by a given interviewer before and after receiving feedback. One interviewer’s interviews \((n = 2)\) were excluded from this analysis because she did not interview any children after receiving feedback. The results indicate that the interviewers were able to improve their interviewing skills after they were provided with written feedback. The proportion of open-ended prompts in the practice narrative increased from \(.64 (SD = .26)\) to \(.87 (SD = .08)\) following written feedback, \(t(7) = 3.23, p = .02, r^2 = .60\). The proportion of open-ended prompts in the substantive phase also increased from \(.72 (SD = .18)\) to \(.89 (SD = .06)\) following written feedback, \(t(7) = 2.86, p = .02, r^2 = .54\). The proportion of episodic language used by the
interviewers in the practice narrative phase of the interview was not affected by feedback (pre-feedback, $M = .78, SD = .23$; post-feedback, $M = .77, SD = .23$), $t(7) = .16, p = .87, r^2 = .004$. For the substantive phase of the interview, interviewers used episodic language the vast majority of the time prior to feedback ($M = 1.00, SD = .00$), and this did not change after they received written feedback ($M = .996, SD = .01$), $t(7) = 1.00, p = .35, r^2 = .13$. Previous research (Schneider et al., 2011) has evaluated the interviewers’ episodic and generic language use during the substantive phase. However, these variables were not considered further during the analysis section because of the extremely high proportion of episodic language used by the interviewers and the resulting lack of variability.

**Interviewer prompts.** Previous research has demonstrated that including a practice narrative can have beneficial effects for interviewer behaviour as well (Price et al., 2013). Specifically, including a proper practice narrative in a forensic interview is associated with a reduction in the overall number of prompts in the substantive phase and an increase in the use of proper prompts (i.e., open-ended prompts). It has been argued that the interviewer poses fewer prompts overall in interviews containing a practice narrative because the child is more informative in response to each open-ended prompt. This effect was not observed in the current study. There was no significant effect of having a practice narrative on the total number of interviewer prompts during the substantive phase, $t(175) = .55, p = .58, r^2 = .002$. This null effect is likely due to the low number of interviewer prompts posed by all interviewers in the substantive phase ($M = 6.27, SD = 3.13, \text{range: 1-20}$). There was also no significant effect of having a practice narrative on the proportion of open-ended prompts in the substantive phase of the interview, $t(175) = .50, p = .62, r^2 = .001$. This null effect is likely due to the large
proportion of open-ended prompts posed by all interviewers in the substantive phase (\(M = .83, SD = .20\)). Previous research (e.g., Price et al., 2013) has compared the number of child details provided in response to open-ended prompts to the number of child details provided in response to closed-ended prompts. However, in the current study this was not informative as a variable because the majority of the interviewers’ utterances during the substantive phase were open-ended prompts.

**Additional Analyses**

**Delay.** Typically, children who are interviewed sooner (i.e., after one day) are more accurate than children who are interviewed later (i.e., one week; Dent & Stephenson, 1979; Flin, Boon, Knox, & Bull, 1992; Powell, Roberts, Ceci, & Hembrooke, 1999). In the current study, children were interviewed either one (65.5%) or two days (34.5%) following the magic show (depending upon camp scheduling). An independent samples t-test was conducted to check for any effects of delay on the outcome of the interview. There was no effect of delay on the total number of details reported in the substantive phase, \(t(175) = .17, p = .86, r^2 < .001\), the number of details reported in response to the first prompt in the substantive phase, \(t(175) = 1.46, p = .15, r^2 = .01\), accuracy during the substantive phase, \(t(175) = .59, p = .56, r^2 = .002\), or accuracy during the cued recall section, \(t(175) = .04, p = .97, r^2 < .001\). Although not statistically significant, children with a longer delay between the magic show and the interview tended to use proportionately less episodic language (\(M = .87, SD = .21\)) than children that had a shorter delay between the magic show and the interview, \(M = .92, SD = .16; t(175) = 1.89, p = .06, r^2 = .02\).
Age. Memory and communicative abilities become more advanced as children develop (Goodman & Melinder, 2007; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Lamb et al., 1994) so it was anticipated that older children would report more details, and provide more accurate details in the substantive phase. For this reason, during data collection an effort was made to randomly assign children across all age groups to the different experimental conditions. An independent samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the effect of age group (6 – 8 year olds vs. 9 – 10 year olds) on the dependent variables. There was no effect of age group on the total number of details reported in the substantive phase, \( t(175) = 1.21, p = .23, r^2 = .01 \). However, there was a significant effect of age group on the number of details reported in response to the first prompt in the substantive phase, \( t(175) = 1.99, p = .05, r^2 = .02 \). Older children reported marginally more details in response to the first prompt \((M = 106.98, SD = 95.21)\) than younger children \((M = 78.66, SD = 93.55)\). Older children also used proportionately more episodic language \((M = .93, SD = .13)\) than younger children \((M = .87, SD = .21)\), \( t(175) = 1.96, p = .05, r^2 = .02 \). There was also a significant effect of age on accuracy during the substantive phase, \( t(175) = 2.41, p = .02, r^2 = .03 \); older children provided more accurate details during the substantive phase \((M = 11.79, SD = 4.01)\) than younger children \((M = 10.33, SD = 4.06)\). Finally, older children tended to provide more accurate details during cued recall \((M = 15.30, SD = 3.55)\) than younger children \((M = 14.26, SD = 4.27)\); however, this difference did not reach statistical significance, \( t(175) = 1.75, p = .08, r^2 = .02 \).

**Episodic vs. generic practice narratives.** As previously mentioned, interviewers almost exclusively used episodic language \((M = .997, SD = .02)\) during the substantive phase of the interview, which made comparisons between groups inadvisable. However,
the use of episodic language during the practice narrative ($M = .76$, $SD = .35$) was not as consistent across groups. Brubacher et al. (2011) demonstrated that the language used (episodic vs. generic) in the practice narrative affects the language used in the substantive phase. It was hypothesized that the commonplace practice narrative topic may result in a less than ideal interview because a commonplace practice narrative may result in the child using more generic language in the practice narrative, which could affect the substantive phase.

First, the language used by the interviewer and the child in the practice narratives was assessed. There was a significant positive correlation, $r(141) = .61$, $p < .001$, between the type of language used by the interviewer and the type of language used by the child in the practice narrative phase of the interview. Practice narratives that contained a high proportion of episodic interviewer prompts also had a high proportion of episodic details provided by the child. An independent samples t-test was used to evaluate the effect of practice narrative topic on interview and child language in the practice narrative. There was a significant effect of practice narrative topic on the interviewers’ use of episodic language during the practice narrative, $t(139) = 4.36$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = .12$. Interviewers used proportionately fewer episodic prompts in the commonplace event practice narrative topic condition ($M = .64$, $SD = .41$) than in the unique event practice narrative topic condition ($M = .88$, $SD = .22$). Likewise, there was a significant effect of practice narrative topic on the children’s use of episodic language during the practice narrative, $t(139) = 2.81$, $p = .01$, $r^2 = .05$. Children used proportionately less episodic language in the commonplace event practice narrative topic
condition \( M = .50, SD = .37 \) than in the unique event practice narrative topic condition \( M = .66, SD = .31 \).

Next, the practice narrative phase of the interview was classified as either an episodic practice narrative, a generic practice narrative, or a mixed language practice narrative. A practice narrative was classified as an *episodic practice narrative* \( n = 72 \) if at least 60% of the language used by the interviewer was episodic and 60% of the language used by the child was episodic (Schneider et al., 2011). Likewise, a practice narrative was classified as a *generic practice narrative* \( n = 21 \) if at least 60% of the language used by the interviewer was generic and 60% of the language used by the child was generic. If the practice narrative did not meet the criteria to be categorized as either an episodic or as a generic language practice narrative, then the practice narrative was categorized as a mixed language practice narrative \( n = 48 \). For the unique event practice narrative topic, 60% \( n = 43 \) were categorized as episodic, 36% \( n = 26 \) were categorized as a mixed language, and the remaining 4% \( n = 3 \) were categorized as a generic practice narrative. For the commonplace event practice narrative topic, 42% \( n = 29 \) were categorized as episodic, 32% \( n = 22 \) were categorized as mixed language, and 26% \( n = 18 \) of the commonplace event practice narratives were categorized as generic. A chi-square test was performed to determine whether there was a relationship between the practice narrative condition (unique vs. commonplace) and the language used by the child and the interviewer during the practice narrative (episodic vs. mixed vs. generic). Children and interviewers were more likely to use generic language during the practice narrative when they were discussing a commonplace event, compared to a unique event, \( \chi^2 (2, \ N = 141) = 13.71, p = .001 \).
Finally, one-way ANOVAs were conducted to explore the effect of practice narrative language (episodic practice narrative vs. generic practice narrative vs. mixed language practice narrative) on the child’s informativeness and accuracy during the substantive phase. There was no effect of practice narrative language on the total number of details reported in the substantive phase, $F(2, 138) = .93, p = .40, \eta_p^2 = .01$. However, there was a significant effect of practice narrative language on the number of details in response to the initial prompt in the substantive phase, $F(2, 138) = 3.20, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .04$ (see Figure 6). Tukey HSD post-hoc tests indicated that children that participated in an episodic practice narrative reported more details in response to the first prompt ($M = 120.60, SD = 107.79$) than children that had participated in a generic practice narrative ($M = 62.95, SD = 85.04$), $p = .05$. There was no difference in terms of the number of details in response to the first prompt between children that participated in a mixed language practice narrative ($M = 90.79, SD = 90.65$) and children that participate in an episodic practice narrative ($M = 120.60, SD = 107.79$), $p = .24$. There was also no difference between children that participated in a mixed language practice narrative ($M = 90.79, SD = 90.65$) and children that participate in a generic practice narrative ($M = 62.95, SD = 85.04$), $p = .53$. Finally, there was no effect of practice narrative language on children’s accuracy in the substantive phase, $F(2, 138) = 1.03, p = .36, \eta_p^2 = .02$, nor was there an effect of practice narrative language on children’s accuracy in the cued recall section, $F(2, 138) = 1.86, p = .16, \eta_p^2 = .03$. 
Figure 6: First Prompt Details & Practice Narrative Language

Fig. 6. Mean number of details (standard errors) provided by children in response to the initial prompt in the substantive phase in relation to the language used by the interviewer and the child in the practice narrative phase of the interview.
Discussion

The NICHD Interviewing Protocol recommends that investigators conduct a practice narrative prior to discussing substantive issue(s) with a child interviewee (Lamb et al., 2007). Until recently, this recommendation was derived from theoretical supposition that having a child practice remembering and reporting information in an informative manner would be beneficial to the substantive phase of the interview. Researchers have now evaluated practice narratives in the laboratory (e.g., Brubacher et al., 2011) and in the field (Price et al., 2013) and have provided evidence that practice narratives are beneficial to children’s informativeness in the substantive phase of an interview. However, specific recommendations, including the length of time to spend conducting the practice narrative and the types of topics to discuss during the practice narrative had not been experimentally evaluated.

In the present study, the composition of a practice narrative was evaluated experimentally to explore which aspects of a practice narrative are essential for observing an improved substantive phase of an investigative interview with a child. The results confirm previous field research (Price et al., 2013) indicating that the substantive phase of the interview is improved when any type of practice narrative is conducted. The current findings suggest that not only does even a very brief practice narrative help children to be more informative in the substantive phase, but that including any kind of practice narrative in an interview with a child can lead to increased accuracy in the substantive phase as well.
Practice Narratives: Discussion Topics

The NICHD Interviewing Protocol recommends that prior to the interview the interviewer should identify a memorable event that the child has recently experienced, such as a birthday party, and prompt the discussion of this event during the practice narrative (Lamb et al., 2011). The goal is to have the child describe the event in as much detail as possible. There is no guideline for how long the practice narrative should be, only that the child should provide an adequately detailed narrative about the event. If the child is unable to provide an adequately detailed narrative about the event, then it is recommended that the interviewer invite the child to give a full narrative of everything the child did on the previous day. If the child is unable to provide an adequately detailed narrative about the events of the previous day, it is recommended that the interviewer invite the child to provide a full narrative of everything the child did from the time they woke up that morning until the time the interview started. The current findings suggest that, in line with NICHD priorities, conducting the first recommended version of the practice narrative (i.e., discussing a unique and memorable event) is significantly more beneficial to the quantity of information gained during the substantive phase than the other subsequent topic recommendations (i.e., yesterday’s or that morning’s occurrences).

Why was practicing a unique personal event more beneficial than practicing a commonplace event? This finding may be explained by the type of memory children were practicing in the different topic conditions. For instance, when children are exposed to an event multiple times they quickly develop a script for that event (i.e., a general event representation of what typically occurs during the event; Fivush et al., 1984).
Fivush (1984) found that once this script has been developed, children remember and report far more general event details about what usually occurs rather than incident-specific details about what occurred during one of the repeated instances of the event. On the other hand, children that have only experienced an event one time are likely to remember and report more specific details because they only have one event to reference (i.e., they have not formed a general representation of the event; Fivush et al., 1984). It is important to note that, in this study, children witnessed the magic show only once before they were interviewed. Therefore, there was a match between the kind of remembering and reporting practiced during the unique event topic condition and the kind of remembering and reporting required during the discussion of the substantive issue (i.e., the magic show). The unique event practice narrative condition may have been a superior type of practice, resulting in a more informative substantive phase, because of this match.

In contrast, children in the commonplace practice narrative were asked to discuss events that took place the previous evening or that morning. Fivush (1984) found that children were able to remember and describe the general routine of an event they had experienced multiple times, but had difficulty remembering and describing specific details about what took place the previous day during the event. Given that the children were able to provide specific details when directly cued for the information, Fivush (1984) hypothesized that the question “What happened yesterday?” may be uniquely difficult for young children. That is, yesterday may be too vague of a cue for young children because not only are they required to distinguish between yesterday’s events and previous events but they must also determine the timeframe that is relevant (i.e., the timeframe of yesterday is dependent on when the question is asked). This may have been
an issue for children in the commonplace practice narrative topic, which led children to discuss routine events rather than specific details about what occurred yesterday. In the current study, 20% of the children in the commonplace condition ended up discussing what they usually do during the evening or in the morning. The children that described their routine were essentially practicing describing a general representation of events they had experienced numerous times. The children that described the previous evening or that morning were practicing describing an instance of a script (i.e., describing what happened on one particular occurrence of an event that they have experienced regularly). Therefore, there was a mismatch between the type of remembering and reporting children practiced in the commonplace event topic condition (script or instance of a script) and the type of remembering and reporting that they were required to participate in during the substantive phase. This mismatch may help to explain why children did not benefit as much during the substantive phase from the commonplace practice narrative topic condition.

The current study and previous experimental evaluations suggest that the way in which the pre-substantive phase is conducted influences children’s later responses in the substantive phase (Brubacher et al., 2011; Roberts et al., 2004). Theoretically, children should be practicing the same type of memory retrieval in the pre-substantive phase as what will be expected of them during the substantive phase (Brubacher et al., 2011). Given that children may be required to provide specific event details in order for the investigation and later prosecution to proceed [R. v. B. (G.), 1990]), interviewers should conduct the practice narrative in a way that promotes detailed episodic responding. In the current study, children’s use of episodic language was not influenced by the different
practice narrative conditions, potentially because the magic show only occurred one time. However, in Brubacher et al.’s (2011) study, they found that children’s episodic responding was influenced by the type of practice the children were engaged in. In their experimental evaluation, the event discussed during the substantive phase was an interactive play session the children either participated in multiple times or only one time. They found that the younger children (5- and 6-year-olds) that practiced recalling a specific instance of a repeated event in an episodic manner reported more episodic details in the substantive phase than the younger children that practiced recalling a script of a repeated event in a generic manner. Importantly, Brubacher et al. (2011) did not find any negative effects of these practice narrative conditions on children that had experienced the play session only one time. In the current study, all children experienced the substantive event only one time. Again, the children’s episodic language was not influenced by the practice narrative condition; however, their informativeness was, in that the children that practiced remembering a script or instance of a script (commonplace topic condition) were less informative in the substantive phase. Future research is necessary to understand exactly how the match between the type of practice and the type of substantive issue influences the extent to which the child reports specific details of the allegation(s) during the investigative interview.

**Practice Narratives: Length of Time**

The NICHD Interviewing Protocol does not provide a specific recommendation for how much time the interviewer should spend engaging the child in the practice narrative phase of the interview. If engaging children in a practice narrative serves as an opportunity to practice remembering and reporting information informatively, then it
would likely take some amount of time for the practice narrative to have an effect. Again, in previous studies the researchers have not attempted to control the time of the practice narrative and tend to only report the general range of the practice narrative times they observed (Brubacher et al., 2011; Price et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997). The results of the current study imply that the content of the practice narrative may be more important than the duration. Participating in any type of practice narrative was beneficial to the substantive phase in terms of the total number of details reported and the number of accurate details reported. Interestingly, children only had to participate in the practice narrative for about two minutes for observable benefits to informativeness and accuracy to be detected. However, participating in a practice narrative for a longer duration (5 minutes) did not significantly improve children’s informativeness or accuracy during the substantive phase. This indicates that conducting the practice narrative properly (i.e., using open-ended prompts) and discussing an appropriate topic (i.e., a unique and memorable event) are potentially more important to the success of the overall interview than the actual amount of time spent conducting the practice narrative.

The current study was the first to manipulate the length of time spent in the practice narrative. This was done in order to determine an adequate amount of time for investigators to spend conducting a practice narrative. It was thought that conducting a lengthy practice narrative (15-20 minutes) may be a waste of investigative resources, and difficult to convince investigators to do, whereas not spending enough time conducting a practice narrative may not have any beneficial effects in the substantive phase. Determining when practice narratives become effective and determining when nothing more can be gained is important information for forensic investigators. With the current
experimental design, there was a deliberately restricted range of times examined. Relatively short practice narrative times were assessed during the current study because it was anticipated that a practice narrative longer than five minutes may appear too lengthy and undesirable for time-pressured interviewers. However, it is possible that additional benefits would be observed if practice narrative times were extended to, for example, 10 minutes or longer. The findings from the current study suggest that it only takes approximately two minutes of practice for the substantive phase to show improvements. However, it is still unclear when exactly practice narratives become effective. Perhaps children are able to understand very quickly what is expected of them and would therefore only require extremely brief practice narratives (e.g., 30 seconds – 1 minute). It was originally hypothesized that the children that spent even more time practicing would be more informative and provide more accurate details in the substantive phase. This hypothesis was not supported by the findings of the current study; however, it is still possible that spending even more time conducting the practice narrative may be even more beneficial to the substantive phase. There is still a need to determine the balance between practice narratives that are too short and those that are unnecessarily long.

**Practice Narratives: Influence on Substantive Phase**

**Informativeness.** Children in the present study that participated in any type of practice narrative reported more details throughout the substantive phase than children that did not participate in a practice narrative; however, there was no effect of practice narrative topic or practice narrative time on the total number of details reported in the substantive phase. It is possible that the nature of the interviewers’ training and feedback inadvertently impacted children’s informativeness. The focus of the interviewers’ training
was on using open-ended prompts throughout the entire interview but most importantly during the substantive phase. However, this focus on prompt type may have influenced interviewers to move onto the cued recall section of the interview sooner than desirable. It seems that concerns about correctly phrasing the question or prompt took precedence over obtaining as much information as possible during the substantive phase. To avoid posing closed-ended prompts, interviewers seemed to have adopted a strategy of rushing through the substantive phase of the interview. This is evident in the very low number of interviewer utterances during the substantive phase of the interview. For example, in six of the interviews, the interviewer only posed one prompt (i.e., the initial prompt for information was the only interviewer utterance). In Brubacher et al. (2011) the number of prompts posed by the interviewer in the substantive phase varied based on the experimental conditions, but ranged from 19 to 46 prompts. For the current study, the average number of prompts posed during the substantive phase was much lower ($M = 6.27, SD = 3.13$, range: 1-20).

In previous research, a reduction in the number of prompts posed can be viewed as an indicator of a good overall interview. It has been argued that interviewers may not have to pose as many prompts in the substantive phase if the child is talking proportionally more often and being more informative in response to open-ended prompts (Price et al., 2013). However, it seems unlikely that posing only six prompts (or fewer) is enough to produce a complete and detailed report from a child. During the substantive phase, interviewers were instructed to attempt to obtain as much information as possible about the magic show (i.e., attempt to reach saturation); however, there were many opportunities for gaining more information that were not pursued. For example, some
children reported how many tricks the magician had shown them, described one or two of the tricks and then simply stopped talking. The interviewer could have said, “You said that there were five tricks, tell me about the first trick she did”, but interviewers often proceeded to the cued recall section without exhausting open-ended prompts in the substantive phase. Had children been given the opportunity to provide more details in the substantive phase, larger variability in reported details may have been observed. Admittedly, the cued recall section was highly structured and much easier to administer compared to the unstructured substantive phase of the interview. If the cued recall section was not included, interviewers may have spent more time following up on some of the details provided by the children instead of relying on the structured questions in order to obtain a full account of the magic show.

It is worth noting that within the context of actual investigative interviews, some closed-ended or more direct questions are likely necessary. The research clearly suggests that open-ended prompts are the most effective in acquiring accurate and informative reports from children (Dale et al., 1978; Dent & Stephenson, 1979; Hutcheson et al., 1995). Likewise, volumes of research warn against the use of suggestive or leading questions because of the consequences these have on children’s accuracy and later credibility (Bruck & Ceci, 1999; Ceci & Bruck, 1993; Goodman, Bottoms, & Schwartz-Kenney, 1991). However, more direct forms of questioning may be necessary to obtain a full account of the allegation(s) (e.g., to direct the child’s attention to people, places, or the event(s) in question; Lamb et al., 1994). Researchers recommend that investigators begin with the most open-ended prompts and gradually work towards more focused questions as necessary (Lamb et al., 2007). For the purpose of this study, interviewers
were instructed to focus on using open-ended prompts to obtain information. Because interviewers may have been too focused on avoiding asking the wrong kinds of questions, potentially relevant information about the magic show was missed. This occurrence in the current study highlights what might happen if investigators attempt to completely eliminate focused questions from their interviews. Therefore, researchers should continue to promote the use of open-ended prompts, but be careful not to over stress their importance to the point that more focused questions are completely avoided. The purpose of training investigative interviewers is to provide them with tools to obtain a full and accurate description of events from children, not to inadvertently hinder them from obtaining information.

In the current study, many of the observed effects of practice narrative components (time and topic) on the informativeness of the children were from the number of details reported in response to the initial prompt. The child’s response to the interviewer’s initial request for information in the substantive phase has been evaluated by other researchers (e.g., Roberts et al., 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997). Researchers have noted that throughout the discussion of substantive issue(s), there is opportunity for the interviewer to unintentionally influence the child’s report through either suggestive prompts/questions, or misunderstandings between the interviewer and the child (Bruck & Ceci, 1999; Ceci & Bruck, 1993). Therefore, the initial invitation for the child to give a full description of the substantive issue(s) is more likely to be accurate and informative and less likely to be a contaminated response from the child (Sternberg et al., 1997). Guadagno et al. (2006) recommended that for a successful prosecution, forensic interviewers need to avoid practices that contaminate or appear to contaminate the child’s
allegation(s). Thus, identifying and adopting techniques that increase the child’s response to the initial prompt, which is most likely to be free from contamination, is critical. It has been argued that allowing the child to participate in a practice narrative would increase the informativeness of the initial response (Lamb et al., 2007). The current findings support this argument and suggest that discussing a unique event (i.e., something memorable and less common) during the practice narrative is more beneficial in terms of the amount of information gained from the initial response than discussing a commonplace event (i.e., something ordinary). Additionally, children that participated in the optimal version of the practice narrative (i.e., discussing a unique event for a longer duration) provided more details in response to this initial prompt than children that practiced discussing a commonplace event for two or five minutes. The children in the “optimal” version also reported more information in response to the initial prompt than the children that practiced discussing a unique event for two minutes; however this difference was not significant, indicating that the topic of the practice narrative is more important than the duration. To maximize children’s uncontaminated initial response, investigators should practice with the child in the pre-substantive phase by discussing a unique event.

Accuracy. The limited number of prompts posed during the substantive phase of the interview likely had an effect on children’s accuracy scores for the substantive phase of the interview. Again, the accuracy score was determined by evaluating how many of the 25 critical details children accurately reported. Many of the points were derived from reporting information about the magic tricks (i.e., the name of the trick, what happens during the trick, the items used to perform the trick, and the secret to the trick). Accuracy
scores were low across all conditions because for every trick the child did not report (i.e., error of omission), at least four accuracy points were forfeited. In this way, the longer the child and the interviewer continued to discuss the magic show during the substantive phase, the more likely the child was to hit on the critical details used to determine accuracy. The relatively short substantive phases observed in the present study likely limited children’s opportunity to provide “accurate” information. If children would have been engaged in the substantive phase of the interview for longer, with additional open-ended prompts, there may have been more variability in the accuracy scores across the different groups. However, this problem was consistent across all conditions, and it was still observed that children that participated in any type of practice narrative tended to provide more accurate details in this phase than children that did not participate in a practice narrative.

During cued recall, interviewers only used information that was previously provided by the child, which likely contributed to the relatively low accuracy scores for this section. It is likely that if the cued recall section would have contained more specific cues the children would have remembered the tricks, and would have been able to provide more of the critical details used to determine accuracy. For example, the interviewers could have said “You didn’t mention this before, but I heard that there was a trick called No Gravity Ketchup, tell me about it”. In this case, no points would have been given for the critical detail of the name of the trick, because the interviewer mentioned the detail first, but the child would have had the opportunity to provide other critical details regarding this trick. This coding strategy would have likely increased overall accuracy scores by reducing errors of omission. There are two reasons why this type of
highly specific memory cueing was not utilized. First, within the context of the current study, maximizing accuracy scores by reducing errors of omission would not have been informative. Practice narratives were designed and are recommended because they are thought to encourage children to report more information, not because they are thought to help children remember more. Children who participated in a practice narrative were predicted to provide more accurate details only because they were predicted to report more information. Therefore, an assessment of accuracy based on what was reported is more informative than an assessment of accuracy based on what could have been reported in response to highly specific memory cues. The second reason why this type of cued recall was not utilized was because the purpose of the current study was to evaluate the utility of practice narratives within the context of the NICHD Interviewing Protocol (Lamb et al., 2007). This protocol was designed to help interviewers obtain information from children in forensic cases in which the truth of the event typically cannot be determined. A scripted, structured questions section is likely too leading and suggestive in the context of forensic interviews with children, so an effort was made to make the cued recall questions as open-ended and non-suggestive as possible in order for the results to be informative and generalizable to actual forensic interviews.

Despite relatively low accuracy scores overall, the cued recall section was included as a standard measure of the children’s accuracy across conditions and was informative as such. Children that participated in a practice narrative evinced higher accuracy scores in the cued recall section than the children that did not participate in a practice narrative. Children that practiced by discussing a unique event provided more accurate details in this section than children that did not participate in a practice narrative.
Additionally, it only took two minutes of practice for children to respond with more accurate details in this phase. However, children that practiced discussing a commonplace event provided as many accurate details as those that practiced discussing a unique event and children that practiced for a short duration provided as many accurate details as those that practiced for a longer duration. Roberts et al.’s (2004) experimental evaluation of open-ended and direct (closed-ended) rapport building phases found that children’s accuracy was enhanced following an open-ended rapport building phase. In the current study, the interviewers posed a high proportion of open-ended prompts during both the unique ($M = .78, SD = .21$) and commonplace practice narratives ($M = .81, SD = .22$). Taken together, the results imply that the types of prompts posed during the practice narrative may be more important in producing later accurate substantive reports than the actual topic discussed during the practice narrative. Further research is necessary to evaluate the effect of open-ended and closed-ended practice narratives on children’s accuracy. Again, this could not be evaluated in the current study because only 8% of the practice narratives contained a higher proportion of closed-ended prompts.

**Language.** The vast majority of interviewers’ prompts in the substantive phase were episodic. There was no effect of the experimental conditions on the interviewers’ or the children’s language in the substantive phase. These ceiling effects were likely affected by the nature of the magic show. Schneider et al. (2011) demonstrated that interviewers tend to adjust their language based on the frequency of the events described in the substantive phase. They found that interviewers tended to use more episodic language when asking about a single allegation of abuse and more generic language when asking about multiple allegations of abuse. For the current study, the interviewers’
language was likely influenced by the knowledge that the magic show was a one-time event (rather than a repeated event). Schneider et al., (2011) also found that the child’s language varied based on the interviewers’ language and based on the nature of the event discussed (i.e., single vs. repeated). In the current study, the proportion of episodic prompts posed by the interviewers during the substantive phase was basically fixed \( (M = 998, SD = .02, \text{range: } 0.83 - 1.0) \), but there was more variation in the proportion of episodic details reported by the children during the substantive phase \( (M = .89, SD = .18, \text{range: } 0.21 - 1.0) \). It is likely that the children’s mixed episodic-generic language was a result of the type of activity the children were involved in, rather than the interviewers’ language during the substantive phase. In this case, the magician showed the children how to do the magic tricks so they could show their friends and family at a later time. When asked about the magic show, children’s language alternated between episodic accounts (e.g., “the way she did that trick was she ___”) and generic accounts (e.g., “the way you do that trick is you ____”). It seems likely that the nature of learning and describing how to perform a magic trick contributed to the mixed language in the substantive phase. For this reason, evaluations of the language used in the substantive phase were not as noteworthy as the language used during the practice narratives.

Brubacher et al. (2011) demonstrated that the language used during the practice narrative can influence the quality of the substantive phase. In the current study, interviewers and children were more likely to use generic language in the practice narrative phase of the interview when they were assigned to the commonplace practice narrative topic condition compared to when they were assigned to the unique practice narrative topic condition. Following from this, there was a tendency for children to report
fewer details in response to the initial prompt in the substantive phase when the practice narrative was conducted in a generic manner rather than an episodic manner. Although some of the children that participated in a commonplace event practice narrative topic used episodic language to discuss what they had done the previous evening and/or that morning, the majority (58%) of the children used generic or mixed language to discuss the previous evening or routine activities. Again, the NICHD recommendation is to have the child discuss an event in order to practice retrieving and reporting information in the same way that they will be required to do for the substantive phase of the interview (Lamb et al., 2007). It is possible that prompting the child to discuss the previous evening or that morning acts as a gateway for the child to discuss their typical routine using generic language rather than discussing yesterday specifically. As discussed previously, if this is the case, then the child will be engaged in a more script-based memory retrieval (Fivush, 1984; Roberts & Powell, 2006) rather than the kind of memory retrieval and reporting that the practice narrative is designed to encourage (i.e., episodic recall; Roberts et al., 2011). In the current study, the commonplace event practice narrative may have been less beneficial in terms of children’s informativeness and accuracy because the children practiced generic rather than episodic memory retrieval and reporting in the pre-substantive phase.

Limitations

As with all analogue research, there are some limitations to the current study that may influence the generalizability of the findings. Previous experimental assessments of forensic interviews with children have been useful in guiding researchers’ and investigators’ understanding of investigative interviews (e.g., Brubacher et al., 2011; Ceci
et al., 1994; Roberts et al., 2004). In the context of actual investigative interviews with children, it is inadvisable to manipulate some of the variables of interest because of the ethical implications. Additionally, some information, such as the accuracy of the child witness, simply cannot be gained in field examinations. Experimental assessments are valuable in that they can speak generally to children’s behaviours and tendencies during interviews; however, it is not always clear how transferable the laboratory results are to actual forensic cases.

**Interviewers.** Undergraduate research assistants were trained to interview children using the NICHD Interviewing Protocol. These students acted as substitutes for real-world investigative interviewers. The research assistants are likely different from actual investigators in terms of their demographics and experience with interviewing children. For example, the research assistants were female, undergraduate psychology students that were selected and trained in one three-hour session by the primary investigator for this study. In contrast, real-world investigators are likely to have more diverse educational and work backgrounds and be trained for different durations by more experienced instructors. The most important difference between the research assistants and actual investigators is the context of the situation. Investigators that interview children using the NICHD Interviewing Protocol are conducting the interview to gain more information about a potential crime, whereas in this study the research assistants were conducting the interview to carry out an experiment. For investigative interviewers, their primary motivation is to obtain facts in order to help protect children and convict criminals. For the research assistants their primary motivation was to attempt to follow the experimental procedures.
The content of the actual forensic interviews and the interviews in this study are obviously very different as well. Forensic interviews are likely to be stressful and contain discussions of complex emotional and potentially traumatic occurrences. For ethical reasons, the experimental interviews were designed to be as stress-free as possible for the child participants and the interviewers. Further, unlike forensic interviewers, the research assistants were interviewing multiple children about the same staged event. This allowed the research assistants to gain an understanding of what actually occurred and to formulate appropriate questions in advance of the interview. Actual forensic interviewers may have some idea of what the child has experienced prior to the interview, but the details of the allegation are unknown and unique from case to case. It is hypothesized that these differences lead to some of the ceiling effects for interviewer utterance type (open vs. closed) and language (episodic vs. generic) observed in the current study.

**Children.** The child participants were recruited from a summer camp to participate in this study. There are obvious differences between children that are assenting to participate in a psychology experiment and those that are participating in an investigative interview. The main difference is the context of the situation. Children that participated in this study witnessed a staged magic show and were interviewed about this event as the substantive issue. For ethical reasons, the context of the experimental interview is, by nature, not negative or emotionally arousing for the children. The child participants were interviewed in a hallway with other children and interviewers relatively close by. Naturally, with these conditions, the children participating in the experimental interview were quite forthcoming with information regarding the magic show. In contrast, children that participate in forensic interviews have likely witnessed a crime or
have potentially experienced some type of abuse or neglect. These children are typically interviewed in private, potentially at a police station, or by a police officer wearing a uniform (Tobey & Goodman, 1992). The context of the forensic interview is stressful, emotionally arousing, potentially embarrassing, and uncomfortable for the child (Lamb & Brown, 2006). With these conditions, children are much more likely to be reluctant to disclose information, especially if they believe that the information could have a negative impact on their family dynamic (e.g., an abuse allegation against a family member; Paine & Hansen, 2002). Although the developers of the NICHD Interviewing Protocol have suggested that the protocol could be beneficial to use in other settings (e.g., developmental psychology studies; Lamb & Brown, 2006), it is primarily used to gain information within this complex and stressful situation. One of the reasons the NICHD Interviewing Protocol recommends using a practice narrative is because it is thought to act as additional rapport building between the interviewer and the child prior to the discussion of substantive issues (Roberts et al., 2011). This is particularly important for actual forensic investigations because it can be extremely difficult to obtain substantive information from children that are uncooperative (Hershkowitz, Orbach, Lamb, Sternberg, & Horowitz, 2006). Children that are already relaxed and comfortable may not benefit as much from additional time spent building rapport in comparison to children that are experiencing a stressful investigative interview.

The children that participated in this particular study may not be representative of all children who participate in actual investigative interviews. For example, it is likely that many of the child participants in this study were from higher socioeconomic status families due to the costs associated with camp participation. Given the link between
lower socioeconomic status and child abuse and neglect (Trickett, Aber, Carlson, & Cicchetti, 1991), it is unclear how this extraneous variable would influence children’s informativeness, accuracy, and language use within the context of a forensic interview containing a practice narrative. Future research would benefit from including children from a variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

The children that participated in this study were between the ages of six and ten years ($M = 8.30$, $SD = 1.20$). As expected, older children were more informative and provided more accurate details than younger children regardless of the practice narrative condition they participated in. Within this age range, the effect of the practice narrative on the child’s informativeness and accuracy was observed. However, it is unknown if the practice narrative conditions would have the same effect on even younger children, or on older children and teenagers. For example, in Brubacher et al.’s (2011) study, older children (7- and 8-year-olds) did not benefit as much as younger children (5- and 6-year-olds) from certain practice narrative conditions. Previous research has demonstrated that younger children are generally less informative than older children, and sometimes require more prompting in order for them to produce detailed narratives (Hutcheson et al., 1995; Lamb et al., 1996; Lamb et al., 2003). Younger children are typically less informative because of their less developed language and communicative abilities (Lamb et al., 1994; Saywitz et al., 1993), so they may benefit more from a pre-substantive practice phase that demonstrates how to communicate with the investigator (i.e., encourages narrative responses). Additionally, it is unclear whether or not the practice narrative becomes ineffective at a certain age. Perhaps older children and teenagers would be more annoyed or suspicious of the inclusion of a practice narrative, and would
not necessarily benefit from the inclusion of a pre-substantive practice phase during an investigative interview. These age groups were not included in the current study so it is unclear whether the beneficial results observed in this study would be transferable to other age groups. Future research may benefit from studies aimed at assessing the utility of the practice narrative in a wider range of age groups.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to further evaluate the relationship between practice narratives and the quality of an investigative interview. Child witnesses and children that may have been victims of abuse have the right to a fair and developmentally-appropriate interview (Bala et al., 2001; Lamb & Brown, 2006). Previous research has suggested that including a practice narrative in an investigative interview, even one conducted in a way considered less than ideal, can improve the overall quality of the interview (Price et al., 2013). The present findings highlight the benefits of including a properly-conducted practice narrative prior to discussing the substantive issue(s) with the child. The NICHD Interviewing Protocol does not provide a specific recommendation for how long the practice narrative portion of the investigative interview should last, but does recommend that investigators identify a unique and memorable event for the child to discuss during the practice narrative. Importantly, the current study demonstrates observed benefits to informativeness and accuracy with as little as two minutes of practice. Finally, given that the unique practice narrative resulted in the most informative initial response from children, interviewers should identify a unique and memorable event to discuss during the practice narrative. These findings provide empirical evidence to support the NICHD Interviewing Protocol recommendations.
References


Appendix A: Magic Show Details (Activity TV, 2012)

Play Facilitator’s Appearance:
- Female
- Wore a magic wizard hat (pointed hat with stars on it)
- Wore a black cape
- Used a magic wand

Overall:
- Magician performed five magic tricks

Magic Trick # 1:
- Name: “No Gravity Ketchup”
- Description: ketchup pack obeys magician’s commands
- Materials: magic wand, clear plastic water bottle, water, ketchup pack
- How to: fill water bottle with water, place ketchup pack inside water bottle, use magic wand to direct the ketchup pack, gently squeeze with the hand holding the water bottle to make the ketchup go down, stop squeezing to make the ketchup rise to the top, squeeze with the right amount of pressure to make the ketchup pack float in the middle

Magic Trick # 2:
- Name: “Liquid Magazine”
- Description: water is poured into a magazine and disappears, the magician then makes the water reappear
- Materials: magazine, water, plastic bag, tape
- How to: the water is actually poured into the plastic bag that is taped to the inside pages of the magazine

Magic Trick # 3:
- Name: “Dirty Laundry”
- Description: magician cleans dirty handkerchiefs in a flash
- Materials: an equal number of white handkerchiefs (half dirty, half clean), and two brown paper bags
- How to: cut the top off of one of the brown paper bags, place the clean handkerchiefs in the bottom of the uncut paper bag, place the dirty handkerchiefs in the cut paper bag, place the cut paper bag inside the uncut paper bag and fold the edges of the cut paper bag over the uncut paper bag, take dirty handkerchiefs out of the top bag and display them, place them back inside and close top of the bag, break open bottom of the bag to display the now clean handkerchiefs.
Magic Trick # 4:
- Name: “Ring Escape”
- Description: key rings are tied to a string, an assistant (confederate) holds the end of the strings making it impossible to untie the knot, under the cover of a handkerchief, the magician removes the key rings from the string
- Materials: shoelace, handkerchief, three equal sized key rings
- How to: the 1st key ring is tied to the shoelace in advance using a special knot that does not require the use of the ends of the strings to un-tie the knot, the other key rings are held in place because of the originally tied key ring and knot, the magician simply un-ties the knot that is hidden under the handkerchief

Magic Trick # 5:
- Name: “Cutting in Two”
- Description: the magician places a shoelace inside of a straw, then cuts the straw (with the string still inside) in half, then makes the string whole again
- Materials: drinking straw, shoelace/string, scissors
- How to: beforehand, the magician makes a cut/slit in the drinking straw, when the straw is folded in half (to cut it in the middle) the string pops out from the straw, this is hidden behind the magicians hand. The magician cuts the straw and leaves the string uncut, demonstrates that the straw has been cut, and then pulls out the intact string from the straw

Note: Each bullet point is considered one critical detail. For this experiment, there were 25 critical details
Appendix B: Interview Outline (adapted from Lamb et al., 2011)

INTRODUCTION:
“Hello, my name is ________, and I am a student from the University of Regina. I was wondering if you would be okay with answering a few questions for me today?”
- If the child said no, the interviewer thanked them for their time and allowed them to select a gel pen.
- If the child said yes, the interviewer continued with the interview, going over the ground rules first.
“Okay great! Just so you know, I’ll be recording our conversation so that I can remember what we talked about, okay? During our conversation it is important that you tell the truth, do you know what it is to tell the truth? I’ll be asking you a few questions but if you don’t feel like answering them that is okay, alright? Or, if you don’t know the answer to a question, that is okay too, just tell me ‘I don’t know’, alright? If I ask you something and you don’t understand what I am asking, tell me that you don’t understand, okay? And if I say something that is wrong, I want you to correct me, okay? Or, if you don’t want to talk to me anymore that is okay too, just let me know, alright?”

RAPPORT BUILDING:
“Okay great! I heard that someone came to ________ (name of summer camp program) and showed you and the other children some magic tricks. I would like to know more about that. But before we get started I would like to get to know you a little better. Tell me about yourself [or] Tell me about things you like to do.”
- The interviewer used facilitators (e.g., “okay”, “mmhhmm (positive)”, “that’s interesting”) and open-ended prompts (e.g., “tell me more”, “what else happened”, “what else do you like to do”) during this part of the interview.

PRACTICE NARRATIVE:
Unique Event Topic Practice Narrative: “Okay, now that I know you a little better I’d like to talk about something fun or special that has happened to you recently. Has anything exciting happened to you lately?” Interviewer keeps asking until an event is identified (e.g., birthday party, holiday, dancing/swimming lesson, soccer/hockey/football practice/game).

Commonplace Event Topic Practice Narrative: “Okay, now that I know you a little better I’d like to talk about yesterday morning [or evening]. Tell me everything that happened from the time you woke up, to the time that you came to the summer camp. [or] Tell me everything that happened from the time you got home from the summer camp until you went to bed.”
• Once an event was identified, the interviewer used facilitators (e.g., “okay”, “mmhhmm (positive)”, “that’s interesting”) and open-ended prompts (e.g., “tell me more”, “what else happened”, “start at the beginning when ________ (detail provided by the child) happened and then tell me everything that happened before/after that”, etc.)

**INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEW (SUBSTANTIVE PHASE):**

“Excellent, you did a great job telling me about ________ (name of event discussed in the practice narrative). Now I would like to talk about what happened the day the magician came to ________ (name of summer camp program).”

• The interviewer used facilitators (e.g., “okay”, “mmhhmm (positive)”, “that’s interesting”) and open-ended prompts (e.g., “tell me everything that happened that day”, “tell me more”, “what else happened”, “start at the beginning when ________ (detail provided by the child) happened and then tell me everything that happened before/after that”)

**CUED RECALL QUESTIONS:**

• After the open-ended prompts were no longer prompting new information (e.g., child said: “that’s all that happened”), the interviewer proceeded to the list of cued questions (see Appendix C).

⇒ At the end of the interview, the child was asked to complete a Line-up Identification Task (Natalie Therrien’s thesis – to identify the person who took the magician’s wand)

**DEBRIEFING:**

“Okay, that is all of the questions I have for you. Do you have any questions for me? [If yes, interviewer answered questions. If no, continued...] Excellent, you did such a great job telling me about the day the magician came. You really did a great job remembering everything. Now I think I understand what happened that day, thank you so much! You really helped us out today and as a thank-you, we have a box of gel pens and you can pick out your favourite one to keep.”

**Note:** If at any point the child seemed uncomfortable, the interviewer asked the child if he/she was okay with continuing on with the interview. If the child wished to stop the interview, the interviewer thanked the child for their time and allowed them to select a gel pen
Appendix C: Cued Recall Questions

Play Facilitator’s Appearance Details:
1. Was the magician a boy or a girl?
2. What did the magician look like?
3. What was the magician wearing?
4. Did the magician use any magic tools?
   - Followed by: What magic tools did the magician use?
5. Was there anything special or unique about the magician?

Magic Trick Details:
6. How many magic tricks did the magician show you?
7. Did the magician have names for the magic tricks?
   - Followed by: What was/were the name(s) of the magic trick(s)?
8. What happened in the ________ (e.g., no gravity ketchup) trick?
   - [or] What happened in the first (second, third, etc.) trick?
9. What did the magician use to do the ________ (e.g., no gravity ketchup [or] first) trick?
10. Did the magician tell you the secret to the ________ (e.g., no gravity ketchup [or] first) trick?
    - Followed by: What was the secret to/behind the ________ (e.g., no gravity ketchup [or] first) trick?

Notes:
(1) Questions 7 – 10 were repeated a total of five times (for a full description of each trick).
(2) The interviewers avoided bringing up details that the child had not previously mentioned.
(3) The interviewers avoided using suggestive type questions (e.g., “the magician showed you the no-gravity ketchup trick, didn’t she?”).
(4) The interviewers did not ask questions about, or prompt the discussion of the confederate taking the play facilitator’s wand.
Appendix D: Research Ethics Board Approval

OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES
MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 14, 2012

TO: Brittany Whiting and Natalie Therrien
    Psychology

FROM: Dr. Bruce Plouffe
    Chair, Research Ethics Board

Re: The Effects of Practice in Investigative Interviews and Lineup Identifications with Children (File # 5151112)

Please be advised that the University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed your proposal and found it to be:

☐ 1. APPROVED AS SUBMITTED. Only applicants with this designation have ethical approval to proceed with their research as described in their applications. For research lasting more than one year (Section 1F). ETHICAL APPROVAL MUST BE RENEWED BY SUBMITTING A BRIEF STATUS REPORT EVERY TWELVE MONTHS. Approval will be revoked unless a satisfactory status report is received. Any substantive changes in methodology or instrumentation must also be approved prior to their implementation.

☐ 2. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO MINOR CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB.** Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 3. ACCEPTABLE SUBJECT TO CHANGES AND PRECAUTIONS (SEE ATTACHED). Changes must be submitted to the REB and approved prior to beginning research. Please submit a supplementary memo addressing the concerns to the Chair of the REB.** Do not submit a new application. Once changes are deemed acceptable, ethical approval will be granted.

☐ 4. UNACCEPTABLE AS SUBMITTED. The proposal requires substantial additions or redesign. Please contact the Chair of the REB for advice on how the project proposal might be revised.

Dr. Bruce Plouffe

cc: Dr. Heather Price - Psychology

** supplementary memo should be forwarded to the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at the Office of Research Services (Research and Innovation Centre, Room 523) or by e-mail to research.ethics@uregina.ca

Phone: (306) 585-4775
Fax: (306) 585-4933
www.uregina.ca/research

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