

From an early age, children begin to learn about language and literacy through the use of storytelling. This is a vitally important time for them to engage with their communication skills, comprehension and critical thinking skills, or nurturing their sense of passion for reading. It is also an invaluable opportunity for children to reflect on their past experiences, recalling accounts of the stories they have heard of, and relating it back to their childhood memories (Alexander et al., 2011). It evokes a profound sense of identity and belonging, a theme that is regularly seen in the New Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022). The major objective of this paper is to analyse how professionals might support language development, by embedding intonation and gestures into storytelling time.

Intonation:

Intonation, in its essence, is the ability to change a tone to communicate directly with the audience when sounding out particular words. It often helps to express your thoughts and ideas articulately.

In the first case, it can be argued that intonation is significant in digital literacy because it effectively allows professionals to convey meaning behind words, such as surprise, excitement, sarcasm, criticism, loneliness, and certainty, which are often lost in text-based communications. It is also essential in realising children's emergent thinking skills, such as using critical thinking skills when being exposed to new situations or behaviours in the books (N. Neumann, and L. Neumann, 2013). In the similar vein, intonation allows storytellers to convey a character's personality, making the narrative sound more realistic and understandable (Hibbin, 2016). In doing so, practitioners can create a purposeful, authentic learning experiences for pupils in the impetus of the classroom environment (WG, 2022).

In the digital recording, the professional has created an iMovie of the book: "The Giant Turnip." This is a humorous re-telling of the classic Russian folktale. Within this novel, the classroom in Miss Honeywood's class planted a turnip that grows to a relatively enormous size, and together they try to take it out of the ground. Once the turnip rolled out of its hole, and onto the grass, the next day Miss Honeywood's class had turnip soup. This story uses simple, clear language to emphasises on the narrative of this plot. The moral message is this: everyone has a legal duty to help out for one another collectively, even if we may have to face up some unprecedented challenges in our lives. No matter how small the issue is, everyone has a role to play in achieving this common goal.

In his work, Vygotsky argued that language and stories are an essential part of children's learning, and that it should always be promoted in all aspects of the wider curriculum (Keenan, 2002). He believes that these experiences would effectively

allow children to learn new things and become critical and independent thinkers in the impetus of the school environment. Moreover, he claims that children often think aloud, and try to make sense of the activities that they are taking part in. For example, the vast majority of pupils have a tendency to talk about the book with their friends, peers or teachers and discuss about specific characteristics, words, or the plot underlying this novel. Vygotsky calls this external monologue, and through this, it is obvious that the sophistication of the child's thinking is shaped by its language development. The child tries their best to develop their understanding of the world by 'his or her collaboration in social activities, and this includes the talk that occurs between skilled and less skilled participants' (Urquhart, 2000: 61). The child guides themselves through problems and this is further developed when forming some important conversations with the professionals (Palmer and Dolya, 2004: 16). In the context of storytelling, it provides a meaningful way for children to learn new concepts, develop language skills and critical thinking, and internalise knowledge in books they are being exposed to. Through these experiences, children are able to build on their zone of proximal development – for example, a teacher who is reading a book can ask probing questions to pupils regarding the book and allow them to think about these concepts in relation to their aspects of life. Similarly, Piaget has the same belief as Vygotsky, that children have a willingness to speak out loud about their opinions and discuss these opinions with another person. This occurrence for her is known as 'egocentric speech' and was further developed by Vygotsky, by proposing that children like to give themselves verbal direction when they face or encounter a problem and think about it critically, like in the case of hearing a teacher read a novel and answer thought provoking questions (Aubrey et al., 2019).

On the other hand, it can be argued that intonation is important for literacy and language exclusively for a range of reasons. Firstly, it enables professionals to convey the meaning of the story beyond words, distinguishing between statements and questions. Secondly, listening to the storyteller's voice can help pupils build on their reading acquisition skills and aid with their comprehension, a vital skill that is required for all aspects of life (Montag *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, children also feel a sense of attachment to the stories that they are being exposed to in school, this is also known as a 'story attachment' (Alexander *et al.*, 2001). Lastly, children are aware of the wide range of sounds that is made in a specific word that is said in the story, and by doing so, this improves their literacy skills (Verhoeven *et al.*, 2019).

In the recordings, the professional read "Farmer Duck" during the storytelling session. They have employed a wide range of literary devices, such as homonyms, onomatopoeia, and character analysis, reflecting on the themes of the book – hardships, fairness, kindness, collaboration, and the need for standing up against bullying. The storyteller was imitating the sounds of "Quack", "Moo" and "Cluck" to make the story more engaging and fun for children, and the repetitive structure of

the book helps young readers learn the story's rhythm and anticipate events. They also utilise repeated language skills to reinforce learning, and to gain new vocabulary development. The sentences are simple and short, making it more understandable for children to grasp and synthesise the book.

In 2014, Dr. Laing published a paper in which she proposed that onomatopoeia is amongst one of the most fundamental aspects for which children gain their language development in the early years. She held in this perception that through onomatopoeia, young infants and children were able to recognise the letters of the words through the establishment of phonics. This is meant to be a fun and an unhurried process, and as such, professionals can implement this through their own environments. Whilst reading the books to pupils, they can mimic the sounds of words such that this story is brought to life. She was an advocate for this, and she suggested that through onomatopoetic sounds, children can gradually develop upon their graphophonological systems: essentially, children have got the intellectual capacity required to know the letters and words off by heart. In hindsight, it is vitally important that staff are being grounded with the knowledge of how to provide effective support with children's transitions in their phonics and linguistics: by giving them the ability to pronounce the sounds of long 'e', short 'a', short 'u', and diphthongs of 'oi', 'eo' and 'oo' to develop their own language skills. These patterns will serve them to decode more complex words independently (McKenzie, 2021). Moreover, she argued that symbolic phrases that resemble mimetic and onomatopoetic words can be salient to further understanding how infants may acquire the first word forms. Children have a drive to learn new things, such as words or vocabulary, in their enabling environments (WG, 2022). However, some of the challenges surrounding this topic is that there is a lack of research based purely on onomatopoeia in terms of child language development in the field of Early Years Education. In terms of linguistics, the study of onomatopoeia has been on its margins of neglect for the past couple of decades (Ibarretxe-Antuano, 2006, cited by Piirainen, 2020). Whilst so, the evidence seems to be clear, that young infants acquire language skills and their lexical skills through onomatopoeia (Kauschke and Klann Delius, 2007; Menn and Vihman, 2011).

Gestures:

In the field of Early Years Education, gestures are non-verbal communication using actions, body language and facial movements to express our ideas before or alongside spoken words (Speech and Language UK, 2024). Examples of gestures may include: clapping, pointing, reaching, shrugging, nodding and shaking head (for yes and no). They are a strong predictor for the children's future development of their language skills. Moreover, it has a wide range of feasible applications in popular storytelling rhymes, such as: The Giant Turnip or Farmer Duck (Sheffield Children's

NHS, 2024). Encouraging gestures can reduce frustrations from pupils and strengthen their communication skills in all aspects of life.

In the digital recording, the professional was able to display gestures in the story “The Giant Turnip” in many cases. For example, the children were using their arms to show the turnip growing from a small seed to an enormous one. Furthermore, the children were making grunting noises to express the efforts of pulling out the turnips from the grounds. They were in a line holding the rope together, and so they were utilising their hands and arms. In all these cases, there is clear evidence to show that gestures is a recurring theme in “The Giant Turnip” to convey the message of this book – that a task can be accomplished through collaborative efforts.

However, in the non-digital recording, the professional was able to demonstrate a strong understanding of gestures in “Farmer Duck” by asking pupils to comment and reflect on the content and the style of the book i.e. ‘What is the front of the book called?’ or ‘What is the back of the book called?’, and then students responded with these questions, by saying, ‘It is a cover’ or ‘It is a blurb.’ These questions were eliciting student’s knowledge and understanding of what a book is, and what are the main features of it. Moreover, gestures were evident through animals, like for instance, when they were steadfast in their ability to show solidarity for the duck and to take action against the farmer.

In the 1960s, Bruner has proposed a constructivist theory, focusing on how knowledge is represented through different modes of thinking. His theory was purely based on his assumptions, and beliefs; that learning is not simply a stimulus-response, but it is rather a continuous process on the wider spectrum. He claims that learning is an active process that is built on their current and past knowledge (Vernon, 2014). Furthermore, Bruner thinks that storytelling is a vitally important part for children to learn on new things. From the earliest ages, the infant child has an innate curiosity to develop their imagination, self-awareness and understanding of the world in cases where they are being presented with picture books during the storytelling time (Ruixue, 2021). He highlights the need for children to grow up in social contexts where their cognitive development will be nurtured, and sustained in all aspects of life, as seen in Piaget’s work (O’Donovan, 2021). In the case of storytelling, as seen in Bruner’s stages of cognitive development, within the enactive mode, children start to listen to stories, and they try their best to repeat the basic letters of the words. In the iconic mode, children begin to gain a stronger understanding of the story; they have got a biological drive to learn new words or vocabulary, and they try to answer questions from the stories. It may be quite helpful for children to draw diagrams, illustrations and use gestures to accompany their verbal information. Lastly, in the symbolic mode, language and symbolism is a crucial part of this process; here children are able to store and process information within language and literacy (Isa and Dangari, 2022). In contrast, it can be argued that

through storytelling, children are able to make sense of complex situations and relate it to their past experience. They can utilise their gestures to support their cognitive development in all aspects of their lives. It is important that practitioners can understand how to realise children's iconic mode in all aspects of their learning and curriculum progression (WG, 2022).

In conclusion, there were a wide range of sources used to analyse the stages of language acquisition, such as identification of sound, noise, babbling, holophrastic stages, intonation and gestures. There was a confident exploration of the crucial role that language and literacy play in the digital world, in the development of young children. There were a lot of techniques employed during the iMovie and recordings to demonstrate how practitioners might use technology to support children's language in their early settings. In the future, a more sustained focus on specific Welsh policies could be relevant to gain wider understanding of the extent to which literacy is deeply embedded in the curriculum.

Confirmation Statement – Use of Generative AI:

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own word. I confirm I have copies of my own drafts, notes, and resources that I have previously used before, and after the use of AI tools which may be asked to provide in evidence.

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