

ECEY5004 Language and Literacy in the Digital Age Portfolio**Introduction**

Storytelling to early-years children, from pre-birth to 7 years old, has been shown by Pulimeno *et al.* (2020) to provide many developmental benefits. The activities performed by the storyteller were aimed towards nursery school children, ranging between three to four years old. Moreover, Hibbin (2016) suggests that engaging in regular complex storytelling increases the children's ability to regulate social skills, develop language rule acquisition, and provide them with greater awareness of the world around them. In addition to these skills, Brodin and Renblad (2020) supports that regular storytelling at home and within school settings can enhance children's literacy and oracy development. As stated by Maureen, *et al.* (2018), as technology has developed over time, children's exposure to digital media has significantly increased, necessitating the greater utilisation of digital literacy techniques. As explained by Maureen, *et al.* (2020) digital literacy can be defined as possessing the required skills to use and understand how to access different forms of digital media.

Main body

Noam Chomsky's language acquisition theory (1957) suggests that babies are born with an innate ability to acquire and use language, gradually strengthening their skills as a child ages. Linked to this, Clark and Casillas (2015, pp. 311-328) suggests that language acquisition is believed to begin before a child is even born. They further explain that foetal babies are able to hear and differentiate sounds whilst in the womb. Additionally, McElroy (2013) suggests that prenatal babies have the ability to listen to their mother's voice during the final ten weeks of pregnancy. Neuam (2012) proposes the concept that throughout the early years of life, children experience stages of questioning. For example, children in the 21-month age range tend to ask what and who questions, whereas when children reach three years old, they are able to ask a wider variety of questions such as where, and when. Although parents are advised by professionals to read at home with their children, Merga (2017) suggests only one in three parents read to their children. They further explain that this can be due to a multitude of different barriers within the home environment, such as, parents or carers not having enough time due to work stressors, an absence of experience in

storytelling, or seeing this as a chore. As supported by Farantika (2022), storytelling activities are suitable and beneficial for all ages, provided the stories are age-appropriate. They consider storytelling to be positive for the development of cognitive and emotional growth. The development of understanding and learning the phonetic alphabet is thought to be a key benefit of reading during the early years. Harper (2011) explains that being phonologically aware is an essential precursor for children learning how to read and indicates high success rates for those learning how to spell. Additionally, O'Brien (2022, pp 71-72) highlights the concept of the impact phonological awareness has on oracy development. As supported by Millard and Menzies (2016), oracy can be described as an individual's capability to communicate efficiently with spoken words. According to Lodge (2020), oracy is often considered to be neglected during early childhood, leading to an increased number of children unable to express their thoughts and feelings. They further suggest that if oracy is suppressed, there is a greater potential that young children's vocabulary may suffer.

As suggested by National Literacy Trust (No date) literacy can be described as the ability to speak, listen, write, and read effectively. They further emphasise the impact that literacy has on an individual's life, stating that from a young age, these skills assist children to develop and communicate. Moreover, as supported by Pelatti *et al.* (2014) promoting children's language and literacy skills can be considered crucial during the early years, as it is a stepping stone to boosting a child's academic and social performance through into adulthood. As suggested by Bishop and Leonard (2014) language delay is considered to be common among two to three-year-olds and can often cause long-term problems. Linked to this, the Welsh Government (2020) states that more than 10% of children and young people who experience long-term speech, language, and communication delays are met with large barriers to communication and learning. Differences in cultures may also prove to be a potential barrier to language and literacy acquisition, especially for non-native English speakers. For example, all European languages write from left to right, however, languages such as Arabic, Farsi, and Hebrew write from right to left. Specifically for digital literacy, native users of logographic writing systems may struggle to adapt to Latin alphabetical writing systems. Furthermore, Internet Society Foundation (2023) suggests that this is especially pertinent as the majority of digital media is conducted through the English language. As mentioned within the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (2023)

the comprehension of language is only able to flourish through interactions and discussions between adults and children, along with the shared enjoyment of reading stories together. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) highlights the impact social interaction has on a young child's cognitive development. If children do not receive continual communication and social interaction with those around them, it is likely that they will not be able to reach their full potential and may experience several language development barriers that could potentially hinder adulthood experiences, such as furthering their education or finding employment.

Throughout the storytelling process, the storyteller can be seen asking multiple story-relevant questions, such as "what does a squash and a squeeze mean?" and "What kind of noise does a pig make?". As supported by Schmidt *et al.* (2023) asking children questions throughout a story can scaffold a child's comprehension of what is being read to them, whilst also promoting oracy development. Additionally, allowing children to contribute to the storytelling process can keep them concentrated and immersed throughout the activity. Further seen throughout the conventional storytelling activity, the storyteller also employs the use of props, enhancing the children's involvement in the stories being read. As supported by Rahiem (2021), children demonstrate increased concentration and enjoyment during storytelling activities where the reader dresses up in costumes and/or uses props. In addition to this, the storyteller utilises various exaggerated facial expressions whilst reading through the in-person medium. As suggested by Kory Westlund *et al.* (2017) this emotive behaviour can be considered important as it allows the narrator the ability to clearly convey the emotions of a character within a written story. In accessory to exaggerated facial expressions, emotive body language may assist in conveying greater emotion, especially when signing to children who may experience hearing impairments. Contrarily, through the digital medium, children's attention may be drawn away from the storyteller's facial expressions in favour of the expressions of the animated characters on screen. This highlights the importance of oral expression of emotion during digital storytelling. Due to this reasoning along with potential overstimulation, the storyteller did not use props throughout their digital activity.

As stated by Bude (2021), alliteration can be described as words that begin with the first initial sounds, tongue twisters can be used as an example for this. Further supported by Symmonds (2020) the utilization of books that include alliteration can

have an effect on phonological awareness skills and can strengthen listening skills. The book used by the storyteller, *A Squash and A Squeeze*, demonstrates the use of alliteration along with sibilance. Sibilance can be described as a type of literary device where hissing sounds are created within a group of repeated 's' words. By making the process of learning new words fun and memorable, literary devices such as these can be beneficial to children's oracy, reading, and writing skills. As demonstrated by the storyteller's activity, Filiatrault-Veilleux *et al.* (2015) suggests that narrating stories and exhibiting oral language can teach children basic rules of grammar, such as word order, punctuation, and how to form sentences. According to Melzi *et al.* (2023), presenting engaging storytelling experiences assists the development of children's narrative skills. Through this newly found skill, children are able to learn how to tell others about themselves, better recite previous experiences, and give out instructions. All of which can be considered to be a great benefit to the development of children's reading, oracy, and writing abilities.

Conversely to the conventional way of reading a story, digital storytelling provides colourful animated illustrations. As supported by Vinayakumar *et al.* (2018) such animations can create fun memories for young children, leading to the development of word-to-object association. Azzahra and Amanta (2021) supports the concept of providing enriching digital reading experiences such as the storytellers', enables children to develop an understanding of the way certain technology works. Becoming familiar with the way systems operate can set children up with the foundation for further development as they grow into adolescence. Further implied by OECDiLibrary (no date) informing children on how to stay safe online is considered highly important in order to prevent them from potential online abuse. Moreover, as supported by Levy and Marsh (2011) young children are considered to be competent users of digital technology from an early age. However, similarly to conventional reading, there are many barriers to accessing digital literacy and language resources. As explained by Kormos and Wisdom (2021) some of these may include insufficient funds for digital technology, inexperienced practitioners, or not all children having the ability to access such technology, sometimes due to additional learning needs. Nevertheless, digital stories often exhibit a range of musical soundtracks, which can enhance children's experiences. Linked to this Donaldson Report (2015) suggests that becoming digitally proficient is essential to learning and that it should be prioritised alongside literacy and

numeracy within the updated curriculum. On the contrary, Raising Children (2023) argues that digitally animated stories can sometimes distract children from learning to read by drawing focus away from written text to animated illustrations. According to Yamac and Ulusoy (2016) implementing digital story activities such as the storytellers' can create a sense of community amongst children by increasing communication and socialisation within a setting, therefore motivating children to develop their reading and writing skills. However, due to time restrictions and pacing of the video format of the digital storytelling activity, the storyteller was unable to ask a large number of questions compared to conventional reading. This is because if a digital story video is paused there could be a possible risk of children becoming impatient and distracted. Moreover, when narrating the digital story, the storyteller often found it difficult to maintain eye contact with their audience, as they were focusing on reading from a digital device.

Conclusion

To summarise, the literature shows that storytelling within the early years can be deeply meaningful for children's literacy and oracy development. Throughout the storytelling activities that were conducted, the role of the adult is particularly important when engaging with children. This was demonstrated through asking questions relating to the stories being told in addition to a wide range of facial expressions being used to visibly convey the atmosphere of each page. It is also evident that digital storytelling has its own benefits for children, these being digital literacy skills such as understanding how a digital device operates, and how to stay safe online. Although it can be seen that underfunded schools, settings and home environments may have trouble with accessing these resources, throughout the literature it is mentioned that curriculum should prioritise digital literacy learning as it is pertinent to a child's future.

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