

ECEY5004/C

Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

Introduction

Storytelling can be defined as an interactive art using words and actions to reveal different images and elements of a story whilst positively engaging the listener's imagination.

Storytelling provides many psychological and educational benefits such as enhancing imagination in order to assist visualising spoken words as well as helping to refine communication skills and improve vocabulary. National Institutes of Health. Children's language and literacy skills are vital in the first three years of their lives and according to Niklas, Cohrssen and Tayler, (2016) it is a common and well known fact that communicating with children can positively support their own literacy and language skills, therefore storytelling is of great importance. Storytelling has been argued to be a key aspect of early years for centuries beginning in the traditional forms of paperback books with a range of narratives such as fairy tales and myths. Bower, (2014). Leading onto digital storytelling in the 21st century. According to Rahiem, (2021) digital storytelling blends the ancient art of storytelling with a wide range of contemporary tools to mix stories together with the author's narrative voice as well as including graphics, images, music and sound. Research argues that simple digital technology made storytelling more entertaining, engaging, captivating, communicative and overall more theatrical.

Main Body

Storytelling is a vital teaching resource with a strong presence since the evolution of human language and has a highly effective role in educating young children. Phillips, (2002). Ramous (2012) explains that when children are engaged and listening to a story it can build a positive relationship between the child and their awareness of reading and writing. Children enjoying reading, writing and listening to stories can lead to social and cognitive development and the understanding of society and the world around them. Stories being dramatized can be particularly valuable for children as it allows children to think in more sophisticated ways Wright et al, (2008). According to Vygotsky, (1978) play provides a medium in which children can easily remember, imagine and recreate from their previous experiences therefore the dramatization of stories mimics this function of play and can be of high importance for social, language and literacy development. However storytelling with younger children can pose some issues especially between those aged two and three as they occasionally have difficulty comprehending concepts of stories and have clear tendencies to tell simplistic or repetitive narratives and are therefore less likely to be able to sit and focus on the dramatization of story presented to them. Nevertheless Paley (2001) states the importance and benefits of incorporating storytelling into the curriculum for younger children even if they are not developmentally ready to participate.

Storytelling has a rich tradition and have evolved and expanded over the centuries. Emergent digital methods are changing the nature of storytelling itself. O'Bryne et al (2018)

It is argues that digital storytelling can provide many significant benefits and can assist in helping build capacity for engaging in literacy and strengthens interactions with those around them. however within these changing dynamics there are questions about the use of digital texts and tools within early years education and whether they have positive impacts. Burnett (2010) it is important to consider how digital practices relate to children's literacy learning especially the art of engaging in storytelling in the early years. On the contrary some may argue digital storytelling is a new direction in developing early language and literacy in early education and according to Flewitt et al.,(2015) iPad's are commonly used in early years settings from nurseries to schools, it is argued that iPad based literacy can stimulate children's motivation and concentration and they offer opportunities for collaborative interaction and communication development. A study showed that practitioners particularly valued iPad's in offering curriculum guidance in new ways and familiarising children and young people with touch screen technologies and new sensory opportunities. It is clear to argue that iPad's pose a good piece of technology that can actively develop storytelling techniques. McLellan (2006) suggests that digital storytelling is the art and craft of exploring numerous media and software applications to portray stories in a new and positive way and tends to be highly personal but at the same time universal which as a result is a very powerful form of communication.

The storyteller in one video used an iPad as a form of digital storytelling, the use of an iPad can benefit children's language and literacy skills as well as developing digital learning where children have the opportunity to turn the pages of the story using their fine motor skills to touch the screen which develops physical development alongside digital learning. The use of iPad's further enhance their engagement and gives children an opportunity to be a part of the storytelling experience, which can have a positive effect and give them a strong sense of belonging and inclusivity.

Bowlby (1993) proclaims the importance of children feeling a sense of belonging and states that a child's emotional and social development in the early years is profoundly shaped by the relationships they form with their primary care givers. His theory argues that the quality of a child's relationship with their caregiver is a critical determinant of the child's psychological development. According to Killick (2011) storytelling has a number of profound benefits on children, their parents and caregivers and can build the key relationships between them. Storytelling can help us appreciate how significant social interaction is in relations to the attachment theory where stories follow the theme of security and attachment. When children feel safe and protected they are stereotypically less fearful of uncertain situations therefore if a child is presented with a story that causes them distress they will likely seek comfort in their attachment figure where this individual is able to offer security and reassurance and this dual role is potentially powerful as it enables children to confidently confront all manner of horrors without experiencing undue distress. Killick (2011) Stories can develop children's emotional literacy by broadening their experiences of the world around them, showing how thoughts, feelings and actions are inter related within stories. The storytellers own emotional responses to the story as it progresses is of great importance as it guides the children's emotional responses also. The storyteller adapting tones and pitch of their voice can be a key

part of the success of a story grasping the children's attention and suspense to know what is happening next.

The use of props in storytelling both traditionally and digitally is of significant importance. Cocherane (2014) expresses that props can draw on children's attention and enables them to feel part of the storytelling experience, alongside developing their literacy skills. The storyteller carried out the use of props in both videos to enhance the interest and engagement of the audience. By using the props it gave another dynamic to the overall experience and invited questions making it a more interactive experience. Froebel at the university of Edinburgh state that as a result of Froebel's findings storytelling is clearly linked to role play and drama and an example of symbolic play and the use of props such as puppets or dolls help to enhance the telling of a story. Children that are accustomed to storytelling often take leaps from specific props to a symbolic one reinforcing the idea of an object representing another leading props into being an important tool to assist storytelling. Stadler and Ward (2010) state that props can positively support literacy and language skills. Alongside Maynard (2020) who discuss that props can grasp a child's attention leading them to becoming more engaged introducing an element of enjoyment whilst encouraging social and language. Toddler Tales (2017) story sacks are a good tool for storytelling and can be an effective way to enrich interest and support language skills. The use of props in the two videos helped to create a more exciting and inviting environment where children had the opportunity to physically interact with the story encouraging their confidence, sense of belonging and interest in the story being told, further leading them onto being encouraged to talk about the story in the future. The storyteller made the use of a soft toy tiger which made the story come to life enhancing imagination.

Recent research into the development and acquisition of early literacy skills has conclusively shown that rhythm and rhyme plays a huge role, this is due to children's early literacy being primarily about listening and speaking rather than reading and writing. Ranson (2016)

(Books and Pieces no date) convey that stories that are written in rhyme can help develop auditory discrimination, listening skills and enriches vocabulary. Therefore children having a good understanding of phonics helps to discriminate sounds and patterns of rhyme in a audible way and children love the surprise of rhyme and its out of the box imaginative possibilities. Kuppen (2018) nursery rhymes are a common feature of early years and deliver spoken language in a way that is easy and engaging. The repetition, sounds, language and rhythm help children to predict what might happen next and builds excitement. Further studies have shown that within early years a child's rhyme awareness is predictive of the ease with which they will learn to read. Bower (2014) argues that rhymes can help children engage in language play with little to no fear of failure with words and those who have excellent initial rhyming skills often go onto becoming better readers and verbal speakers. Kinsmith (2021) well chosen stories that include rhyme and rhythm positively encourage children to engage more deeply to engage more deeply and the almost musical experience of language encourages the use of different tones and expressions making stories vibrantly come to life.

The storytelling experience promotes children's oracy skills through the storyteller asking simple questions that require the audience to respond accordingly. Encouraging the children to answer and ask their own questions as well as promoting their digital literacy skills through the instructiveness use of the iPad where the storyteller involved the children by asking them to turn the pages. Asking questions can be of importance as it engages listeners attention and focus. According to Wordsmith (2022) curiosity comes from our desire to answer questions and the best way to evoke this in the listeners is to set up questions and pose answers. Having multiple questions throughout a story develops the listeners intuition and can hook the audience into the scene and into following sequences. Stated by Torralba (no date) there are two types of questions that can be asked, closed and open. Closed questions are helpful at the beginning of storytelling when the storyteller provides the background and context of the story which will in return immediately make the child more interested. During the reading of a story it is important that eye contact is maintained and proper voice modulation is present, talking how the characters may speak to make it more exciting. A good sign that a child is engaged in a story is if they interrupt in order to ask their own questions, showing their listening skills. Allowing them to ask these questions is important. Ending the story with questions for example 'did you enjoy that?' 'what have we learnt?' helps the child or children to process and reflect on the story, developing their mental skills of memory. The storyteller within the videos asked simple questions before, throughout and at the end to engage the listeners for example 'what do we think this story might be about?' with the use of props as a reference to help the children guess.

Conclusion

Research and theories have shown the clear importance of storytelling in the early years and how it has many benefits to children's language and literacy skills. The different formats of storytelling both digital and traditional equally have their benefits and can be used to person preferences. The use of the traditional paper storybook helps children learn how to read the stories themselves. Physically turning the pages and when older role playing storytelling to their peers. Either way storytelling will continue to be of significance within the 21st century and following on into the future of early years.

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