

An exploration into how teacher questioning, and the use of resources can impact upon young learners' engagement with stories.

Gallwch ychwanegu'ch targedau o'ch aseiniad diwethaf gan ddefnyddio'r tabl isod. /

Please add your targets from the previous assignment using the table below.

	Targed/Target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn. What I have done in this assignment.
Targed/Target 1	Aim to increase the level of critical analysis.	I have taken this into consideration and have attempted to do so.
Targed/Target 2	Use your ability to evaluate the literature to form persuasive and sophisticated judgements.	I have taken this into consideration and have attempted to do so.
Targed/Target 3	Address minor referencing errors	- I have included references after quotes. - I have italicised referencing titles.

Word Count: 5,451

This paper will focus on how teacher questioning, and the use of resources can impact upon the engagement of young learners with stories. It has been my experience that stories can be hugely impactful for young learners. Along with numeracy, literacy is universally acknowledged to form an essential part of the foundation of education (Donaldson, 2015). The early years of a child's life are crucial in order to equip them with the skills needed for the classroom (Williamson, 2020). Therefore, it is vital that a focus on literacy is prioritised in early years education.

During my second professional teaching experience I was placed in a nursery class in a large primary school in South Wales. The teachers report that many pupils enter the nursery performing below the expected attainment level. In my class the attainment levels were varied. Some children could count to ten and write their name whilst others found it difficult to remain in class for an entire lesson. However, story-time was somewhat of a leveller in that every child could take part regardless of attainment. My partner had been placed in a reception class in the same school. We discussed this research topic and compared our experiences with class storytelling. Having both had similar experiences, we decided to proceed with this research. We felt that by maximizing the engagement and enjoyment during story time, a love of reading could be nurtured within our classes thus giving the best start to these young children embarking upon their educational journey.

Literacy is an essential piece in the foundation of education (Donaldson, 2015). Estyn has stated that the best schools ensure that the development of literacy skills is prioritised (Estyn, 2017). It has been found that learners who cannot read with understanding appropriate to their age underperform across the curriculum (Estyn, 2013). Statistics tell us that 12% of adults in Wales lack basic literacy skills and one third of UK businesses are dissatisfied with the literacy skills of the young people entering the workforce (National Literacy Trust, 2017). Therefore, we must ensure that good literacy skills are developed and nurtured from the earliest of ages. Having researched the topic further, the importance of storytelling to the development of early literacy skills cannot be overstated. Storytelling offers a central road for language development both in the mother tongue as well as in the development of additional languages (Wright, 2019). Stories also help children to develop their reading and listening skills; to appreciate various points of view; and to understand their world better (Eades, 2006). Wales has seen a decline in children reading for pleasure (McCrum, 2013). Many people list technology as a factor, however Ann Keane, the former

chief inspector of Estyn, feels the reason is that many parents do not know how to motivate their children to read (McCrum, 2013). Parental engagement will not be the focus of this paper; however, this view highlights the importance of a child's intrinsic motivation to read. The National Literacy Trust (2017) reports the longer children enjoy reading the greater the benefits in school. Storytelling can be a fun and memorable way of learning. The following research focuses on two methods of increasing the engagement of young learners with storytelling.

Assessment for learning (AFL) or formative assessment is the process of searching for and then interpreting evidence in order to decide where learners are at, where they need to go next and how to get them there (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). Summative assessment involves summarising pupil attainment at a set time whereas formative assessment or AFL is a method of constantly keeping learners on track (Black&William,1998; William, 2002). Effective questioning is said to be at the heart of good pedagogy. Questioning serves many purposes including engaging students in the learning process (Doherty, 2017). Gelmini-Hornsby et.al. (2011) promotes the use of two types of questioning; review questions which encourage students to restate the content and thinking questions which encourage children to think beyond the content presented and consider wider connections. Certain researchers have found that thinking questions benefit student learning more (King, 1999), however the literature on this topic is not in complete agreement (Doherty, 2017). I feel that thinking questions are generally more beneficial, however due to the age of the pupils we felt it was right to use both types of questioning to monitor and encourage engagement.

My partner and I investigated the benefits of various AFL strategies. In our study we used questioning, thumbs up and think-pair-share to enhance the story and each child's benefit from it. It has been found that AFL is an extremely effective method of increasing standards within the classroom, particularly for pupils with lower attainment (Black&William,1998). By using AFL, I hope to increase the engagement of the lower attaining children as the attainment spectrum in my class is wide. Think-pair-share encourages quality critical thinking through the process of personal thought, the development and validation of these thoughts by a peer and finally the opportunity to gain further knowledge and different perspectives in the share stage (Robertson,2006; Welsh Government, 2010). We hope to use think-pair-share to help the children to glean more from the story and to learn from their peers. Discussion is important for understanding. When learners have a chance to build on each other's contributions and reflect this leads to a deeper and richer understanding (Barron, 2003; Chi, 2009). Critiques have expressed concern that higher attaining students may be

held back if they must help peers, however it has been proven that pupils who give and receive help within a group gain the most from the experience (William, 2018).

In addition to the AFL strategies discussed we enhanced the story using resources. The purpose of using resources is to enhance the story and generate additional opportunities to improve language capabilities such as comprehension, vocabulary and phonics (Hyland, 2007). It was Neil Griffiths who first developed the idea of a story sack in the UK in the 1990s. A story sack contains various items to support and stimulate the reading of a specific book. The idea is that the book can be brought to life using various resources related to the main characters and items in the book. A strength of story sacks in the development of early literacy is that it can support various levels of competency (Barron et.al. 2003). This is important for my class in which there is a wide spectrum of attainment. Story sacks are fun and engaging for children. Research has shown that by making learning fun and enjoyable we can have a positive effect on children's retention (James et.al, 1998). We remember things better when they are woven together with a plot, when they stir our emotions or impact us (Landrum et.al, 2019). It has been said that props can be distracting for the reader and listener (Medlicott, 2019). Medlicott (2019) recommends keeping props simple in order to avoid this. Story sacks are a visually interesting and tactile method of reinforcing a story. When used appropriately, they have the potential to motivate and excite the children about the particular book and reading in general (Hyland, 2007).

The methodology used in this lesson study is lesson research, which is a form of action research. Action research involves systematic inquiry with aim of improving social issues or problems (Lewin, 1938; Stringer, 2008). The work of Kurt Lewin has historically been associated with action research (Hine, 2013). Lewin (1938) viewed action research as cyclical and collaborative. By repeating a cycle of planning, observing and then reflecting, measures for social improvement can be achieved (Hine, 2013). Action research in education can be used to structure a school or lesson study with the aim of improving the quality of education and resolving problems (Mills, 2011; Stringer, 2008). The main aim of action research in the educational sphere is to improve the lives of the pupils concerned (Mills, 2011). However, action research can also benefit teachers as it can lead to professional development by enabling teachers to discover new things about their classroom, promoting reflective practice and openness to new approaches, expanding their pedagogy and giving teachers a sense of ownership over their practice (Barone et al., 1996; Hensen, 1996; Hine, 2013). Teachers feel a sense of empowerment when they can enact positives changes in their classroom generated from their personal research (Fueyo & Koorland, 1997; Hensen, 1996). Action research is also an effective way of bridging the gap

between research and practice (Mills, 2011). Research assists teachers in understanding what they observe in the classroom through a process of study, action and reflection.

Our study took place in a large primary school in South-East Wales containing just under 500 pupils. I worked with a partner for this lesson study and we conducted the study in each of our placement classes. For my partner this was reception and for me this was nursery. The school has around 38% eligibility for free school meals and is a pioneer school tasked with working alongside the Welsh Government to develop the new curriculum area of Health and Wellbeing (Estyn, 2018).

In this lesson study, data was collected using a focus group of selected children. The focus group were selected as a sample of the class. My partner selected a higher (Child P), middle (Child C) and lower (Child S) attaining child to focus on. I selected a higher (Child O) and lower (Child SG) attaining child plus one more higher attaining child who is strongly suspected to have Asperger syndrome (Child H). Whilst one partner engaged in the study of their class, the other partner was a non-participant observer. In order to structure the non-participant observations my partner and I developed an observation schedule based upon the Leuven scale (Figure.B). The Leuven Scale involves a screening process in which the subjects are assessed for their involvement and well-being over several weeks (Laevens, 1994). The results form the basis for following interventions. Our observation focussed on the engagement of each child based upon factors such as eye contact and seating position. The results were taken over the course of two days and four lessons. The results of the observation schedule were quantitative in nature as we gave each child a score reflecting their level of engagement. Quantitative research involves finding out the extent of an occurrence (Kumar, 2019) whereas qualitative research is more exploratory (Cohen et al, 2011). Qualitative research allows the researcher to investigate the nature of an occurrence (Kumar, 2019). My partner and I also collected qualitative data in the form of interview questions. The interview questions were collected by the participant observer and recorded using video. Due to the young age of our subjects, we thought carefully about how we would interview. We decided to ask them pre-planned questions throughout the story and then a few more afterwards whilst they were drawing their favourite part of the story. Children's drawings have been described as their personal narrative in which they can explain their experiences (Anning et.al, 2004). Whilst the children drew, we were able to ask them about their drawing and why it was their favourite part of the story. The last method of data collected was a video of each session. For privacy purposes the video has not been included in the appendix, however I have included transcripts of the key parts (Figure.D).

Following the cyclical nature of action research, my partner and I developed a reflection model to assist us in this study (Figure.A). We were inspired by Gibbs' reflective cycle in creating this model (1988). The Gibbs model provides a structured framework for thought and reflection (1988). Like the Gibbs model, our reflection model contains six stages (Figure.A). My partner and I used this to form our reflections immediately following each lesson. The observation schedules, videos and interview answers were all used to inform our reflection. I will also be using this model to reflect more fully upon each lesson further into this paper.

Prior to commencing this study my partner and I applied to the UWTSD Ethics Committee for ethical approval. The research was conducted according to BERA (2018) guidelines. The consent of the children, their parents and the class teacher were all obtained prior to commencing the study. Lewis and Lindsay (2000) have noted there is debate as to whether child consent is necessary. However, in accordance with Bera (2018) the children's wellbeing was our primary concern when planning this study and so we felt it necessary to request each child's consent. The children were also free to withdraw from the study at any point and in fact this did happen when some participants did not wish to engage with the post-reading activity. All paper consent forms containing sensitive information have been safely stored in accordance with the UWTSD Research Data Management statement (2018) and Bera guidelines (2018). The consent forms will not be included in the Appendix in order to protect the data of each pupil.

During the lesson studies we read the book 'Sunk' by Rob Biddulph. Sunk tells the story of Pirate Captain Penguin Blue and his friends who sail the seas in search of treasure and adventure. The story contains cross curricular themes such as numeracy when they count the seas 1-7 and science when it discusses how they raised a sunken shipwreck. The story also involves rhyming, which is important to the development of early literacy (Ranson, 2016). The aim of this study was to identify methods of improving the engagement of young learners during storytelling. Using resources, we aimed to capture their attention and engage their interest. Using questioning, we aimed to engage them by increasing their thinking and understanding. After completing one lesson study in each class we considered how we could improve the lesson. We were keen to test our theories and to see their effect. Consequently, we decided to conduct two further studies incorporating the adjustments. Gorard (2013) points out that a control group is necessary in order to detect if a method has had an effect. However, Bera (2018) raises concerns about withholding from one group a method suspected to be positive. Taking this into consideration and the fact that results could also be affected by the age difference we decided to give both lessons to each group.

I will now discuss the lessons which took place in nursery. Both studies were carried out in a quiet room. I sat on the floor with the children whilst my partner sat to the side completing the observation sheet. Wright (2019) has pointed out the importance of the seating position of the storyteller. I wanted to be in their eye-line whilst reading the story. The plan for each lesson (Figure.B) was to read the story whilst incorporating resources and AFL strategies. Following the lesson, we asked the children to draw their favourite part of the story whilst we casually interviewed them. During lesson 1 our resources were very simple including a pirate flag and large images of each character. During lesson 2 our resources included the flag, pirate hats, a toy boat, gold coins, a treasure map and soft toys to represent each character (Figure.F).

We invited the children into the room for lesson 1. The children were excited to see the pirate flag and the two higher ability children immediately identified its significance. The children were very engaged to begin with and listened carefully. The highest and most consistent engagement came from the high attaining child who does not have an ALN. O maintained good eye contact and seating position throughout the study. During questions, O's answers showed understanding and retention of the story (Observation NA5 and NA7). O did not know every answer instantly, however by questioning O he was able to recall and develop his thinking (Observation- NA5). During the lesson I used the AFL strategy think-pair-share. I have never seen this strategy used in nursery; however, the children made a good attempt to engage (Observation-NA1). The think-pair-share activity was introduced to consider what would happen to the boat after it had been ripped. The discussing consisted of simply whispering 'sink' to each other, however this activity made this event more memorable for the children. After the story, O indicated it was his favourite part (Observation-NA3) and H also remembered this part as he indicated that he did not like when the boat sank. Child SG also benefitted from the think-pair-share activity in that she was able to benefit from being involved in the activity with the higher attaining children. SG's thinking process was aided and encouraged by the others. AFL strategies have been proven particularly effective for lower attaining children (Black and William, 1998). SG has just recently started nursery and her attainment quite a bit lower than the other children. Having a strong peer influences and role models could help her progress.

When asking the children who their favourite character was, I used the character image resources. This helped the children to remember the characters and why they liked them. H remembered his favourite character and explained why he liked him using the pictures (Observation-NA5). H did not voluntarily explain why he preferred Cutlass Jeff, however

through questioning he thought about it. AFL strategies have been proven to be effective in enhancing the learning of the pupils by causing them to stop, think and consider (William, 2018).

Overall, the lesson went well, however it could be improved. Firstly, I would add more physical resources to increase excitement and engagement. The children were initially very excited by the flag, however this declined. It would be good to maintain this excitement by introducing resources throughout the story. As mentioned, O's focus and engagement was good throughout. However, H and SG found it more difficult to focus as time progressed. Using questioning I was often able to reengage H, however this was more difficult with SG who sometimes did not understand the questions. I feel that her engagement may be more successfully secured using resources. Secondly, when introducing think-pair-share I would model this to the children in more detail so that they could understand its purpose and format. I hope this will encourage more discussion. Teacher-modelling is an important aspect of AFL (Welsh Government, 2010).

The following day, I repeated the lesson with the changes discussed. As we invited the children in, we gave each a pirate hat and seated them on the pirate flag. As I read the story, I introduced each resource. It was observed that focus, engagement and the answering of questions were all improved from the previous day. This showed that they were more engaged with the story and had a greater understanding. The children were excited when each resource was introduced. When watching the video back the children are smiling and laughing more than before. They are also leaning forward, keen to see and touch each item. SG was noticeable the most excited by the resources. She laughed, smiled and pointed each time a resource was introduced. The resources also added to their understanding and appreciation of the context of the story. As I showed each child the treasure map, I asked them to find the treasure (Observation-NB2). Each child was able to look at the map and find the x. This added to their understanding of what it meant for the pirates to follow their map and made the experience more authentic. Donaldson (2015) has emphasized the importance of authenticity in learning. I was also able to use the resources to explain why the boat sunk when it ripped (Observation-NB3). This would have been more difficult for them to understand without the resources.

I continued to use AFL strategies in addition to the extra resources. My aim from the previous day was to encourage the children to engage in some level of discussion by modelling think-pair-share. This did not really work out as there was no more discussion that yesterday (Observation-NB3). Bennet (2011) has claimed that AFL is a work in progress,

however Shavelson (2006) states that the work to be done is in ensuring that teachers are implementing AFL effectively. I feel that I did not implement think-pair-share appropriately in this instance. I attempted to explain and model, however I feel that the topic was a bit complex for nursery. Perhaps a simpler question would yield better discussion and quality talk. Additionally, the children are likely to improve with practice.

After the story we asked the children to draw a picture, however they wanted to leave. By using one of the puppets I was able to encourage them to stay for a few questions, however they did not want to draw. In retrospect I feel the session was too long. Introducing each resource and re-enacting scenes took more time than expected. The children enjoyed the story, however when they decided they had had enough it was difficult to dissuade them. This was particularly the case with H who sometimes finds it difficult to focus. When H left this made the other children also want to leave. Perhaps a shorter story with fewer characters and events would be more appropriate for children of this age whilst also incorporating the story sack and AFL strategies. Medlicott (2019) has recommended keeping resources simple. The resources did increase engagement, and this was particularly obvious with SG. However, in future I would give more thought to timing in order to secure engagement for the entire session and following activity.

The same two lessons were conducted in my partner's reception class. Whilst my partner told the story I measured engagement using our observation schedule (Figure.C). We secured a quiet room in which to conduct our first study. Six children participated of which three were observed. The observed children were of high (P), middle (C) and low (S) attainment. Again, the children were excited and interested by the pirate flag when they walked in. My partner also used the flag as an effective way of keeping the children seated, by referring to the flag as a pirate boat which they had to stay inside. Overall, this lesson went well. The engagement of the high attaining child was consistently strong throughout the study. P's input was on topic and his answers were accurate. During think-pair-share P was sat beside another high attaining child. They engaged well with think-pair-share although it is not something they are used to doing (Observation-RA4). However, the middle and lower attaining children did not engage with think-pair-share. We think that the seating arrangements may have had an effect as the higher attaining children sat together and the lower attaining children sat together. In the next lesson we plan to improve upon this by controlling the seating arrangements. The middle and lower attaining child answered several questions accurately, however each also offered unrelated input at points. The middle attaining child also became distracted by the flag. In this study we felt that several things could be improved including rearranging the seating as pointed out previously. As in the nursery lesson, it was the lower attaining children whose attention dropped throughout the

story. In the following lesson we used more resources to maintain their attention. Our improvements were aimed at improving the engagement of the lower attaining children whilst maintaining the already good engagement of the higher attaining child.

Our second reception lesson followed the same format as the second nursery lesson expect that my partner told the story and I made observations (Figure.C). During and after the lesson, the children answered questions accurately and their drawings were relevant. The children were particularly good at remembering the names of the characters. When watching the recording back my partner would read the story and then recreate it with the resources. I feel the use of the resources and the repetition of their names enabled the children to better remember the names (Observation-RB1-2). However, the reception children seemed less excited by the resources compared with nursery children and in general engagement seemed lower. We feel this was due to several factors. For this lesson we had to use a more public room as the original room was not available. During the lesson several people walked or looked into the room. This understandably caused distraction and disruption. We also found that toward the end of the story the lower ability children became distracted by the resources and tried to reach for them. From this lesson we have learned the importance of managing the environment. We had no choice but to use the available room, however I feel that it did compromise the results to an extent as the children were distracted by the disruption. In the end we had to leave the room early as another teacher needed it. We did rearrange the seating, this helped in that the children did not distract each other; however, I feel this was counteracted by the other distractions. The children were able to answer questions and give relevant input, which shows they were listening and engaging; however, I feel that engagement would have been higher without the unexpected disruptions.

Through this study we found that both resources and AFL strategies can have a positive effect on the engagement of children if used appropriately. Beginning with resources, engagement definitely increased, especially with the younger and lower attaining children. Dombey (2010) states that children who engage the most with reading are those who enjoy it. Particularly with the nursery children, sparking and encouraging the enjoyment of reading is important. Child SG struggled the most with the questions and often just answered by following her peers, however she was the most excited when the resources were revealed. Cremin et.al (2009) has found that engagement in reading has a profound effect on reading progress. If child SG enjoys reading her literacy skills will progress more quickly. There was not time during this study to prove the long-term effects of increased engagement, however a study conducted in Montana showed that positive engagement with teachers correlated with improved literacy skills and general progression during preschool years, regardless of

classroom quality (Terri et.al, 2017). For the higher ability children, the resources caused them to be more involved in the story. The children could see the story being played out before them in addition to hearing it. O showed his engagement by independently questioning how the pirates would raise the sunken wreck (Observation-NB5). This line of thinking was not prompted by questioning, but by pure curiosity from O because he was engaged with the story. The resources caused a number of learning opportunities, which would not have otherwise occurred such as map reading (Observation-NB2), discussing how a sail works (Observation-RB3) and learning about why the rip in the boat caused it to sink (Observation-NB2-NB3). Story sacks provide the opportunity to scaffold the learning of the pupils. When introducing more complex ideas, having tangible resources makes it easier for the children to understand. The more complex discussions mentioned would not otherwise have arisen. The negatives of the resources could be seen when they caused a distraction to S and C toward the end of the second reception story session. Medlicott (2019) has suggested introducing resources and then putting them out of sight. During this session we asked them to wear the hat and left the resources within touching distance. In retrospect, this was not wise, but can easily be improved in future.

During each session my partner and I used AFL strategies to encourage thinking and quality discussion. The strategies benefitted the class in that they considered things they would not have otherwise such as why a boat would sink or how a sail works (Observations NB3 RB3). Furthermore, the lower attaining children were able to benefit from hearing the thoughts and ideas of the higher attaining children.

In conclusion, this assignment has given me an understanding of the planning and preparation needed in order to conduct education action research. The results of this research are interesting and enlightening, however they are limited in some ways. As with most research, the validity of the data collected can be questioned. Observations were captured using our Leuven Scale inspired schedules (Figure.C). The scale invited us to rate each child's engagement from 1-5, however we cannot guarantee that our perception of engagement is equal. This will affect the reliability of this evidence. Perhaps in future we could both fill in the schedule whilst watching the recording in order to increase consistency.

The main drawback of this research was the timeframe in which it was completed. Cohen, Manion and Morrison advise

'the larger the sample the better' (2011;144),

because this leads to more dependable results. Due to time it was not possible to conduct this research across a large sample, however I feel this would have yielded more

dependable results. Hayes (2010) warns that when dealing with people there is often difficulty in achieving the level of control necessary to produce outright conclusions. This is because a reaction from an individual could be down to various external factors. For example, in the second reception lesson we had to use a more public room. Between the noise outside and various people walking in I feel that this must have affected the results. This disruption was obvious; however, participants may also be affected by less obvious factors such as home-life or culture. By conducting a study across a larger sample, exceptional results will be more obviously seen as such. Small scale research has been criticised for yielding results that are less generalisable than research taken from a large sample (Tsang, 2013). Many researchers have questioned the validity of research that cannot be generalised and applied widely (Mintzberg, 2005; Smith, 1975). However, generalisation has been described as purely that which leads from particular to general concepts (Hargreaves, 1996). This definition could be applied to this research and thus it could be taken forward and applied widely. Yet on the other hand, Gorard cautions that

'it is ... more ethical to find out whether interventions work and have side-effects before rolling them out in an uncontrolled (or general) way' (2013; 133).

In my next placement I have requested to be placed in the foundation phase. I plan to continue testing and developing the theories discussed. With more testing and experience I feel I can form more solid conclusions on this topic.

However, the study does have strength in areas. I feel one strength is in the fact that we were able to study the class with barely any resources compared to many. Particularly in the nursery where the room did not change, we were able to clearly see the positive effects. When seeking to gauge the effect of something it is useful to also see the effect of its absence (Gorard, 2013). When examining the data collected, I found the video evidence most useful as I was able to look at their non-verbal communication. The nursery children's increased enjoyment of the second session could be clearly seen when watching the video.

A second positive, was that I was able to pilot aspects of this study in advance. During my placement I have often used puppets with success. When selecting the resources, I included a puppet seal. Having piloted this method, I hoped it would be successful. As hoped, the children responded very well. When the children wanted to leave, I was able to get them to remain by using this puppet (Figure.E).

Considering the research conducted I feel that resources do have a positive effect on the engagement of young children. Although this was not so evident in our second reception study compared to our second nursery session, I feel that the nursery session faced fewer

extenuating circumstances and so is more reliable. If I were to conduct this study again, I would ensure there was enough time to gain more accurate results such as waiting for a quiet room or conducting the study again. It also would have been beneficial to conduct the study with more children in order to provide a larger sample of data. However, it is often necessary to compromise between

'the ideal and the achievable' (Burton et.al, 2014; 63)

when selecting research methods. Given the time and resources available, we collected the most accurate and useful data we could. Were this research to be taken forward, it would be my recommendation to collect more data on the topic. Despite its limitations, this research and the experience of carrying it out will be useful as I proceed in my career. Regarding AFL strategies, sensitivity regarding the age and stage of the pupils is essential. These strategies can be very useful but must be rolled out appropriately. As with all elements of teaching, knowledge of your pupils is the key to success.