

Word Count 2048

Language and literacy have evolved through history and has played a major role in everyday life. It has and impact on every individual even pre-birth. We are immersed in it as it is all around us in our world, culture and society. How adults interpret and engage with babies from the offset will contribute and help them with their journey of how they learn and develop over the years. The amount of input and variety of strategies that are provided to the children will influence how they undertake their own journey through language and literacy. Parents play a huge role in the development of children's language development and children are very responsive to the attention of their parents. When parents spend time talking to their children, their progress in language and speech is a lot smoother and it is an important part of their learning and development especially as parents play such an important role in children's emergent literacy (Bower 2014).

In the story of The Gruffalo, I have signed along to the story using British Sign Language BSL and Signed Supported English. As I work in a setting with Deaf children it is important for all children to be included at story time. This also benefits mainstream children as they can learn signs too so that they are able to communicate with their peers. Using facial expressions and being articulate when telling the story will hold the children's attention and interest. As the story follows a pattern and words are repeated and rhymed, the more the story is read to the children the more rememberable it will be so that older children will know what part is coming next and be able to tell the plan of the story in their own words. When observing the children watching the story I was able to keep the interest of the age range up to 7. Although the older children are familiar with the story and most have read it many times, they were engaged watching the signing, with a few children moving their hands along with the story trying to copy the signs. I was able to have an in-depth discussion with them regarding the plot of the story and their feelings on the ending of the story. With this age group a lesson could be planned to incorporate the story into mind maps, getting the children to change aspects of the story and a what happened next. With the younger children, due to the repetitiveness of the story most were able to recall what had happened in the story. The children could talk about the characters and the setting of the story. With the deaf children the story is beneficial in getting the children to try and use their imagination. Deaf children tend to be quite literal when it comes to storytelling and perceive the world as black and white. It can be hard to get deaf children to think outside the box so by telling the stories, especially fictional ones and being able to explain and discuss the story they are having a greater awareness of developing their own imagination and helping them with their language development (BATOD 2024).

Language and literacy are used in everyday life and sparks from before a baby is born. When a baby is developing in the womb at around 18 weeks of pregnancy, they will be able to hear sounds from within the mother's body. From around 27-29 weeks of pregnancy the baby can hear some sounds outside the mother's body especially her voice (nhsdirect 2024). Price-Donahue 2017 states that talking to your unborn baby so that they can hear your voice will establish auditory bonds that will continue after birth as the child develops. The soothing tones will have the advantage of lowering the unborn baby's heart rate. Research has been conducted that show by reading to an unborn baby whilst in the third trimester will help with language development and after birth when spoken to might be able to recognise words heard in the womb. Reading books that are repetitive and have a rhythm will contribute to healthy brain development (Larson 2014). Reading books to children from as soon as their born will give them the best start on their journey to exploring language and literacy. It should be part of their everyday routine so that children can become excited about reading and not think of it as a chore. It also gives parents quiet time to spend with their children and can have discussions on the book they have read, broadening the child's language development. Reading should be an enjoyable activity carried on into adult life. The knowledge gained by reading is invaluable and gives the individual the power of language both written and spoken. Language is so important to new babies and toddlers and parents should be encouraged to always communicate with their children. Even something as simple as going for a walk opens up so many opportunities for communication (Hayes 2016). Engaging with children from the offset plays a vital part of their language development. Using facial expressions and gestures can expand their world of imagination and creativity. Children must have receptive language to make them understand what is being said and prosodic features of speech support this. By children having unconditional positive regard will allow them prosody to communicate. Piaget (1929) states how reading is how language and literacy are a vital part that contributes towards cognitive development and Hart and Risley (1995) tells us that the higher level of language that a child receives will allow good language development whereas low levels will have the opposite effect. Children can ask up to 76 questions per hour for them to understand the world around them. They are genuinely interested in finding out information and should the questions not be answered will continue to ponder on the for days later. Although to adults it can be perceived as persistent and annoying, adults should be prepared to answer the questions as best they can and interact with the children. By doing this it will help the children with their thirst for understanding and be beneficial to their learning and development. It will also help them with their well-being by letting them gain confidence and independence by being allowed to have freedom of speech (Levato 2018).

In my digital story of *The Snail and the Whale* this gives the children an opportunity to engage in a different kind of storytelling by someone else rather than their teacher. This allows the practitioner to complete assessments on the children whilst not reading the story themselves. By providing some pictures but not all from the book the children can use their imagination to piece together the story. Asking questions throughout benefits the children by helping them to engage more and participate in discussions along with their peers. Having some open-ended questions allow the children to have their own individual input and gets them talking with their peers to help their language development. The digital story can be accessed at any time and for older children it could be played solitary with the lesson plan for them to write their own answers down helping them with their writing skills, spelling and grammar. Observing the children, many of them were engaged, some children shouted out the answers while others put up their hand to answer. As digital competencies are part of the Curriculum for Wales, the digital stories can be included in the digital competency framework and projected over the cross curriculum. Donaldson (2014) was brought in to adapt the curriculum and introduce the digital competencies giving the children the benefit of learning and developing in the digital world (gov.uk 2024). You could see the quieter children of the class did not engage as much. As there was no BSL or SSE in this story the Teacher of the Deaf could sign along at the side to make it accessible for deaf children. Subtitles would not help the younger children as most of the words would be above their capable reading level. You could set a lesson plan for children to tell their own story and have one of their peers record it so that it could be shared with the class. This is a good opportunity to enhance their digital competency skills alongside their literacy and language development (NDCS 2024). I feel that I could add more animation next time to my digital story. It would be beneficial to myself to develop my own digital competency skills to be able to deliver more interactive digital stories helping with the children's language and literacy development.

Edspire (2023) studies show there is a decline in adult led communication and interaction with children causing adverse effects. As in today's world there are many working parents and along with everyday tasks and jobs to be completed, parents find it harder to allocate time to engage with their children. Children are now being occupied with electronic devices such as tablets or the television. Although older generations feel this is a bad idea it does pose the opportunity for children to learn through technology in this digital era. Parents themselves are now preoccupied on their mobile phones interacting on social media and other apps. Children will follow learned behaviour so should a child see their parent on their mobile phone or tablet for a good amount of time they will follow. Children are given devices as a way to occupy them and this has an impact on the serve and return bonding attachment that should be established with parents (Forbes 2022). Digital devices could never replace the benefits of adult

communication and interaction, a child listening to a story that is being read on a device is more beneficial than having no input at all. There are many accessible apps and storytelling websites available, but children should have adult supervision when accessing these. It would also be beneficial if adults ask children questions about the story and get into discussions, communicating with them helping with their speech and language. Singing songs to children is a great way for them to develop language.

By having a repertoire of songs that are sung to children they will become familiar with the tunes that they will start to hum along to before becoming verbal, adding in the lyrics and the new words to their vocabulary. Kucirkova (2018) mentions Nursery Rhymes are repetitive so are simple enough for the children to learn but have become dated overtime and can be seen as discriminative and irrelevant today. Again, songs can be listened to on digital devices and children would benefit from being exposed to child friendly songs as often as they can. Parents could play them in the car, and they should encourage the children to join in. Even if the children are not singing the correct words, it will still help with their development by getting them used to making sounds. Many children might have speech and language delays or impediments and the earlier these are detected the better it is for the child's development. Professionals will provide the correct support and help the children with their language journey. Modelling storytelling to children will help with their confidence. Encouraging them to talk to you and tell their own version of the stories to both adults and peers will give them a sense of independence (Dickinson 2019).

Storytelling can be both visual and vocal, the more expression and articulation an adult put into the story the more a child will gain from it. With my digital story I feel that I could have added the words to the story so that older children will be able to read along too, benefiting their ability to enhance their reading skills. Language and literacy are a skill that is taken for granted and without it the obstacles that both children and adults would face daily is unimaginable. The barriers to their development would be so great that it would be detrimental to their self-confidence. Giving the child the ability to read is giving them one of life's greatest gifts. Lodge (2020) states communication is a key life skill. Let their imagination and creativity grow and remind them there is always time for one more story.

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ECEY5004 Language and Literacy in the Digital Age
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