

Analysis

This paper will analyse two separate storytelling sessions, including one in the traditional format reading a book and the other in a digital format using a computer screen. The benefits of storytelling in regard to promoting children's literacy and the development of digital literacy will also be explored linking this to current practice and theory. According to Satriani (2019) if an adult reads to their child from a very early age, then this can help familiarise the child with words, sounds and language and help to develop their early literacy skills. Furthermore, throughout this paper there will be a focus on the topics of phonological awareness, repetition and onomatopoeia with links back to the storytelling sessions.

According to Gillon (2018) in order for children to learn to read then first they must learn phonological awareness. Phonological awareness means having the ability to recognise, identify and manipulate the individual sounds in words which are called phonemes (Stekic *et al.* 2023). According to Bhamani (2017) an important aspect of phonological awareness and something all expecting mothers should be aware of is the very early stages of developing literacy skills and language acquisition whilst in utero. Bhamani (2017) believes that babies whilst in their mother's womb have the ability to differentiate between sounds. According to University of Kansas (2017) babies in utero are very sensitive to the rhythmic properties of language spoken which potentially lay the very first building blocks in their language acquisition. Therefore, Book Trust (no date) places emphasis on the importance of mothers reading story books to their unborn babies to help promote the babies brain activity, language development and early literacy skills. University of Kansas (2017) state that these literacy skills continue to develop after the baby is born when they are read to continuously. Furthermore, Laing and Bergelson (2020) suggest that although the baby cannot talk at this point, they continue to develop their literacy skills and learn about the world around them. The storyteller is continuing to provide rich linguistic experiences for the children in both of the storytelling sessions, which according to Neaum (2012) is vital in promoting the children's literacy skills.

Neaum (2012) states that language development is innate, meaning it is in their nature, however, other aspects of language development, such as the rate in which a child will develop will look different for every child. This aspect of language

development requires nurture, meaning if the child is exposed to storytelling, rhymes, or conversation with adults then this provides the child with rich experiences to help develop their literacy skills and language development (Neaum, 2019). Jerome Bruner developed the Language Acquisition Support System theory after taking influence from the work of Lev Vygotsky (Rannikmae, Holbrook and Soobard, 2020). They both agreed that young children have an innate ability for language acquisition, however, argued that they do require interactions with others in a social environment who speak the same language as them in order to excel in their learning (Brodie, 2014). According to Gonulal and Loewen (2018) this is known as scaffolding, which Bruner suggested that when young children are nurtured and supported whilst learning a new concept or skill then they are better able to use this information independently. Therefore, the role of the storyteller is vital in promoting the children's literacy skills, by engaging with them and expanding their vocabulary (Lenhart *et al.* 2020). There is evidence of this in both of the storytelling sessions. The storyteller is engaging with the children and asking them questions throughout the story, also known as sustained share thinking, enabling the children to engage with their imagination and helps to develop their oracy skills (Brodie, 2014).

Another aspect of phonological awareness that is going to be explored is the importance of children learning and recognising the sounds of the alphabet, also known as phonemes. According to Ehri (2022) phonemic awareness is the first step to being able to read fluently. It is fundamental that children are able to recognise letters and sounds in order to develop their literacy skills (Clayton *et al.* 2019). Ways in which this can be achieved as shown in the traditional storytelling session is pointing to the words in the book. The storyteller uses their finger to point to the words as they are reading them out which helps the children to match the sound to the written word (Rawlins and Invernizzi, 2018). Mohamed *et al.* (2019) suggests there are other activities to promote children's phonological awareness such as, matching pictures in storybooks to words being spoken. There is evidence of this in both of the storytelling sessions, especially the digital one which showed an animation of the book playing on screen that helps bring the story to life. This can help the children develop an idea of what is happening in the story even though they might not understand some of the words being read out (Brown *et al.* 2021). The storyteller also demonstrates how to hold a book correctly, how to turn the pages and which

order to read in as shown by pointing with her finger. Ehri (2022) suggests this is beneficial to develop the children's reading skills.

According to Reese, Schaughency and Taumoepeau (2020) the inclusion of repetition in storybooks is important and helps to reinforce specific words or speech to young children in order for them to form an understanding of them and even attempt to repeat them. Children often repeat new words back to you as they learn them and (Horst, 2013) suggests children will learn letters and words by continually seeing them written down. According to Saxton (2017) repetition is considered a language imitation skill, therefore the better a child is at imitating suggests they will be good early speakers. This has a direct effect on a child's holistic language development (Larson, 2014). Research conducted by Ledger (2019) found that rhythm and repetition are essential for the development of children's language and literacy skills. The age of the children will have an impact on the rate at which they can learn and remember new information, as younger children will need longer to encode new information as they forget faster than older children (Spiro, 2017).

In the new curriculum for Wales, it is mandatory for all practitioners to help children develop and encourage progression in literacy and digital competence (Welsh Government, no date). The Donaldson review set out that the new curriculum for Wales would focus on a subject based curriculum with a dynamic approach based on skills and competences (Dauncey, 2021). Some of the areas for learning and experience recommended by the Donaldson review included languages, literacy and communication, and technology (Dauncey, 2021).

Storytelling plays a crucial role in the development of children's literacy, with the digital storytelling session encouraging progression in children's digital competence. Practitioners can take guidance from the new curriculum with regards to progression steps in children's literacy (Welsh Government, no date). This advises practitioners on what children should be able to do in each progression stage, for example Welsh Government (no date) states children in progression step one will be displaying an interest in story books and other reading material and are able to hold the book up to read correctly, as displayed by the storyteller. In addition, the children will be able to recognise familiar text, such as their name for example. With continued engagement in imaginative, fun storytelling sessions, Welsh Government (no date) state children

are able to progress and develop their literacy skills. However, there are barriers to this as many children will progress at different speeds, there may be additional learning needs undetected which could cause a delay in language development and therefore a delay in the development of their literacy skills (Spencer *et al.* 2014). It is important that practitioners are able to recognise when a child may need some extra support and are able to put that in place for them (Westlund *et al.* 2017).

Within the new curriculum digital literacy has become far more important. Digital literacy refers to the ability to use technology in early years education for the early acquisition of digital literacy skills which is an essential part of children's communication development (Welsh Government, 2018). Children will learn to be competent in using digital technology and access the internet to discover, use, read and create material. According to Erstad and Gillen (2020) children will be faced with different types of resources, such as QR codes, hyperlinks and audio clips for example, therefore children are required to learn specialised digital literacy skills, which differ from ordinary literacy skills in order to read and interact with online content. According to Welsh Government (2022) children are expected to collaborate on and create digital content in an ethical manner in line with the Digital Competence Framework set out by the Welsh Government. Within the digital storytelling session the storyteller placed emphasis on the repetition by singing the words to encourage the children to sing along. Garcia Conesa and Juan Rubio (2015) suggest this is a useful way to help the children learn new words and the meaning of them. The storyteller also demonstrated to the children how the video plays and how to use the mouse to pause it, this is beneficial in the development of their digital literacy skills.

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory supports the importance of repetition in storytelling to help the progression of children's literacy (Macblain, 2018). Vygotsky believed that the ZPD was the space between what a child can do now and what they can do with the support of a more knowledgeable individual (Irshad *et al.* 2021). With the help of the storyteller repeating words several times and pointing to them, Irshad *et al.* (2021) believes this will provide the child with the support they require in order to learn and develop their literacy skills.

The last topic being explored in this paper is onomatopoeia, which is a word that describes a sound, such as 'bang', 'zoom' and 'crash' for example (Mardell and

Swann, 2016). The use of onomatopoeia in children's storybooks is very popular as it can enhance the setting and the tone of the narrative (Pihl, 2022). Sahan *et al.* (2017) suggests that onomatopoeia is used to keep the child's attention and helps to keep them engaged in the story. In addition, Hayes (2016) and Sasamoto (2019) believe that the use of words like 'bang', 'crash' and 'pop' help the child to better understand the meaning of the sound and in turn help promote their oracy skills. Onomatopoeia is used throughout both of the storytelling sessions with the storyteller placing emphasis on the onomatopoeic words, such as 'swishy, swashy' in reference to the family walking through the grass for example. This enables the children to use other senses to understand what is happening throughout the story (Laing, 2017).

During the traditional storytelling session the storyteller has considered the environment in order to enhance the experience for the children. The session takes place in the outdoors where 'long, wavy grass' is evident, a 'dark forest' and the noise of the river in the background. These elements work perfectly with the theme of the story which is a rich, imaginative and engaging way to tell a story to young children according to (Harris, 2016). According to Waite-Stupiansky (2017), theorist Piaget believed that children construct meaning by interacting with their surroundings. Furthermore, he suggested that the way children interact within their environment is what creates learning (Brown and Desforges, 1979). The storyteller asked the children to feel the grass and continued to ask how it felt when they touched it. This allows the children to associate these words and meanings with the real-life environment and developing their understanding further (Lefa, 2014). The traditional storytelling session encouraged the children to engage with the different textures and noises surrounding them which Piaget believed was beneficial for stimulating their literacy skills and their holistic development (Waite-Stupiansky, 2017).

To bring this paper to a conclusion it is evident that during both of the storytelling sessions the storyteller engaged with the children throughout and encouraged them to use their imagination and expand on what would happen next in the stories. However, moving forward the storyteller could make use of the 'teddy bear' prop that was visible, this could help represent the bear in the story, therefore bringing that to life and making the experience more enjoyable for the children. After exploring the

research of providing rich, engaging storytelling sessions it is evident that these experiences are what creates learning for young children (Larson, 2014). In addition, it is important that parents and practitioners understand the importance of storytelling and engaging with children in order to aid their holistic development and develop their literacy skills (Whitehead, 2010). Furthermore, the continues provision of opportunities to engage with digital technology, fun storytelling, talking and engaging with one another is what develops young children's literacy and digital literacy skills.

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