

ECEY5004 – Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

Introduction

According to the National Storytelling Network (2019), storytelling is “an interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination”. The meaning behind this quote is that storytelling can be performed in a variety of different ways through actions and creativity, not just through reading from a book. Four main benefits of storytelling are that it helps improve language and literacy skills, helps develop nurture imagination with storytelling, it encourages the enjoyment of reading and writing and it helps to develop cultural understanding (Essential Resources, 2023).

According to Jan Dubiel, a specialist in early years education, storytelling is an effective means of delivering the curriculum as it provides a view in to the world and it provides a platform for exploring ideas, emotions and behaviours. As storytelling is engaging for children, it makes delivering the curriculum and children's literacy easier (BookTrust, 2024).

Scott and Marsh (2018) summarise how digital literacy in early childhood is a fast growing area. They talk about how ways of communicating in modern years are more complex than ever before which borders both traditional reading and writing and a growing range of new ways to communicate across multiple media devices. An online article written by Joyce (2024) supports what Scott and Marsh have said by saying that digital literacy is becoming a fundamental skill for all. Joyce says that by introducing computing in to the early years foundation stage, it will help children become familiar with technology and allow them to learn how to use it from a young age. It will also prepare them for a world where digital skills are labelled as 'essential'. Furthermore, it's a good way to teach them about internet safety from a young age which ensures they are using technology in a safe both in and out of the setting.

However, Wilson, S., Murcia, K., Cross, E. et al. (2023) states that research suggests that children can come across inappropriate content for their age which can affect a child's use of digital technology and can also affect how a child thinks. In the same journal article, it mentions that use of digital technology should not replace 'real-life' investigations, physical activity, outdoor experiences and social interactions.

Main Body

The first area of the storytelling is to analyse the difference between reading with a digital and physical book. The practitioner first uses a physical book to read to children and an article written by Sarah Schwartz and Sarah D. Sparks suggests that children first begin to start reading when they figure out how to decipher words on a page (Schwartz and Sparks, 2019). In an article by Mayo Clinic, which includes Dr Kimberley Bennett, she discusses how reading to a baby in the womb can play a part in early language development. Studies that

were carried out suggests that newborns show a preference to languages they have heard during the pregnancy. It advocates that pre-natal audio experiences contribute to language learning. Finally, the article talks about how babies who are exposed to more language in the womb tend to have better language skills later in life (Bennett, 2024). A similar journal by Montag, J. L. et al. (2015), discusses how picture books develop the vocabulary that children use. It mentions that shortly after birth, parents continue to read to their children which has the potential to be an important part of a child's language development. The books are usually picture books which include unique words rather than vocabulary from child-led speech. These type of books can be seen as an important source of vocabulary for children. The practitioner also uses a digital format of reading which can encourage learning through ebooks and apps. Research also shows that when technology is used correctly, it can be an important guide to reading for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (National Literacy Trust, 2019). In a survey that was carried out between January and March 2018, it explored children using technology to read links with their reading enjoyment, behaviours and attitudes.

Theorist, Chomsky (cited in British Council. N.d.), coins a theory which includes the Language Acquisition Device. This part of his theory is a system of principles that children are born with that helps them learn a language, the order that they learn different structures and the mistakes they make as they learn. Similarly, Neaum (2021) discusses the importance of language acquisition and says the ability to obtain and use language is important to a human's participation in society. Neaum also discusses how language can be spoken, heard, read, written or signed and it allows us to communicate with others along with help maintain relationships with peers.

However, Bruner (cited in Neaum, 2021), was concerned that Chomsky had paid very little attention to the role of interaction in language learning. The Language Acquisition Support System (LASS) was aimed at it. Bruner's argument was that for the Language Acquisition to develop, children who are learning speak need to be included in clear and repeated conversations with others. His work on language acquisition is part of a wider understanding that learning is a process in which children are engaged in creating new ideas and concepts.

The second area to analyse is the use of props and outfits in storytelling. When telling the story digitally, the practitioner uses an outfit to tell the story. Using props and outfits can help the children feel part of the story, bring the characters in the story to life, add another learning style (some children learn visually), it encourages children to interact with the story and talk about it, allows for open-ended questions and answers and helps develop children's listening skills (It's All About Stories, 2024). After the story has been told, children can use the props to re-tell the story and use them to create their own versions. Murray, V (2021) says that by adding character to the story, it allows the children to engage with the characters, understand them and they can begin to explore them for themselves.

For children, props are a great way for children to re-tell their favourite stories, explore new endings or create brand new stories. Stevens (2012) writes about how props can support children with limited vocabulary. This could be for children with additional learning needs or those who have English as an additional language. Using props allows children to touch and explore the objects. Stevens also discusses that regular use of props supports a child's growing vocabulary. An example which she uses is the child trying on a woolly and straw hat. This allows children to think about other items made from straw and wool and learn about the characteristics of a hat.

Vygotsky (cited in Yonzon, K.C., Fleeer, M., Fragkiadaki, G. et al, 2022) suggests that the foundations of creativity is through drama and play. He believes that using props, having roles and creating dramatization during story telling can help children engage in imaginary play. Vygotsky's theory (cited in Grove, 2015) uses a term 'scaffolding' which outlines how adults provide structure for children which they gradually remove over time to help children become more independent individuals. At first the child contributes a single piece of information and it is the adult who builds the story. This allows children to experience what an independent and confident narrator looks like with children gradually taking more of a lead.

Within Wales, there is a curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings. An area of the curriculum is labelled as 'enabling adults'. This is where adults should set expectations for learning by creating safe environments that supports children who begin to express how they feel and regulate their feelings in positive ways. This area of the curriculum can link up with storytelling and the use of props as practitioners can use props from the stories, they are reading to allow children to express themselves and show how they are feeling.

The final area which will be looked at is body language and eye contact. Throughout both recordings, the practitioner uses appropriate body language and engages with the children through eye contact. Research shows that good interaction between adults and children make a large difference to how language and communication skills develop. Adults who are enthusiastic and show an interest in talking with them provide benefits for the child (Department for Education, 2023).

Whitehead and Ebrary (2009, p.40) say that by using your voice in different ways when reading, it can outline the plot of the story, set out the moral and emotional narrative of the story and help to describe characters. This can be done through changes of pitch and volume and by using pauses. When reading, regular eye contact with the children and positive facial expressions, gestures and body language can tell the story in a great way and keep the listeners interested. Similarly, Hayes (2016) names what makes a good storyteller, and this includes having skilful eye contact, volume, emotional tones, gestures, facial expressions and body language.

Early years practitioners are also able to help children with hearing impediments develop their language and literacy skills by reading book in British Sign Language. Body language is important to those who are deaf as they need to be able to see the book, your face and the signs that the practitioner is using. It will help the child understand how different elements of the story are connected. For children with this impediment, eye contact is needed in order to keep their attention (National Deaf Children's Society, n.d.).

Hurst (2024) writes a blog post which discusses life long benefits of British Sign Language. By communicating in this way when reading a book, whether it be normally or digitally, it gives them the chance of communicating before any speech has developed. Adults are also giving children the opportunities to finger spell through fine and gross motor movements which helps to improve literacy at a young age.

Within Wales there is guidance named 'Siarad Gyda Fi' which was created to support the development of speech, language and communication (SLC) in early years settings. The guidance aim is to develop practitioner knowledge, skills and confidence of SLC to identify and meet the needs of the children within the setting. A practitioners role is important to support the development of children's SLC. The way that adults acts plays a big part in how quickly a child develops. This includes the body language and eye contact that they give to the child. When adults model and promote language, children are actively engaged in experiences and activities (Welsh Government, n.d.).

Conclusion

To conclude, there were a good number of sources used throughout the assignment. One of the books that were used was named 'Supporting Language and Literacy Development in the Early Years. This book was informative and a substantial amount of useful information was gathered from it. However, the book was published in 2009 so could be seen as outdated. A video that was used named 'The crucial role of storytelling in Early Childhood Education' was created in 2024 and gave a good overview of story telling from a specialist's point of view. It was and up to date source to use and accurate.

Finding sources on the topics discussed in the assignment was difficult due to sources not being from reliable and some links on the University Moodle page showing as unavailable. Sources were found through Google Books, the reading list provided by the University and carrying out self-research.

No artificial intelligence was used during the research or writing of the assignment.

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