

I acknowledge the use of Chat GPT on

- 3.10.24, I used the prompt 'Summarised article by Hibbin'.
- 4.10.24 I used the prompt 'Summarise article called mother child book sharing and children's storytelling skills in ethnicity diverse, low-income families'.
- 4.10.24 I used the prompt 'Summarise article Parental influence on the development of children's storytelling'
- 5.10.24 I used the prompt 'Summarise article The impact of parents' smartphone use on language development in young children'.
- 21.10.24 I used the Prompt 'Can you proofread the following text for grammatical and spelling errors please'.

ECEY5004- Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

Introduction

Storytelling plays a crucial role in shaping and developing children's language, literacy, cognitive, social, and emotional skills. This analysis compares two distinct storytelling approaches: the traditional telling of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' and the interactive digital version of 'Dear Zoo' where children actively engage by listening to sounds, predicting events and interacting with the screen. This essay will explore the benefits of storytelling from pre-birth to seven years, linking to literacy development, and examining the growing role of digital literacy in early education. It will also analyse both storytelling approaches including strengths and weaknesses and how each method promotes oracy, reading, writing, and digital literacy skills in children. The conclusion evaluates the sources used to support this analysis.

Benefits of Storytelling

Research suggests that language development begins even before birth. Partanen *et al* (2013) argues that the fetus is already learning from sounds in its environment, particularly speech-like stimuli. This early exposure provides a foundation for language acquisition and auditory discrimination skills, which are crucial for cognitive development after birth. Similarly, research by the University of Kansas (2017) highlights that a month before birth, infants can distinguish between languages such as English and Japanese as they are able to recognise rhythmic differences. Laing's (2016) article supports this theory and suggests 'motherese' plays a significant role in encouraging infants to follow the rhythmic properties of language. This method has shown infants pay more attention and tune-in when adults use an exaggerated, wider pitch range. The research further explains that isolating key words slowly at the end of sentences and using reduplicated words give infants time to process, making it easier to determine where a word starts and ends, igniting stronger brain activation. These 'serve and return' interactions, including stories, songs, and conversations, build neural connections that are essential for language development, learning communication patterns, social cues, and emotional bonding, all crucial for cognitive and social development (Three Core Concepts, ND). Similarly, reading a book with repetitive phrases, such as in Goldilocks ('big, medium, and tiny'), reinforces vocabulary helping segment and internalize the words in developing brains.

Role of Imagination and Creativity

Storytelling not only expands children's vocabulary but also enhances listening, comprehension, creativity, and problem solving supporting both expressive and receptive language abilities. Stories help children move beyond their immediate surroundings, to develop intellectual thought patterns and foster emotional development (BBC, ND). Through stories, children are exposed to diverse characters, emotions, and situations that help them build empathy, understanding and think

critically about the challenges characters face. Hibbin (ND) suggests that oral storytelling has a positive impact on emotional development. When children actively participate, especially through call and response interactions, they engage deeper with the narrative. This fosters self-expression and emotional literacy by allowing children to reflect on their own emotions and those of others through identifying with the characters. As a result, it prompts feelings of empathy and reflection on others' perceptions. Similarly, Berkowitz (2011) highlights the benefits of oral storytelling for both inclusion and kinaesthetic learning. As children engage with the story, they develop a deeper understanding of concepts such as sequence, timing, and movement. This physical involvement reinforces learning through a multisensory approach, making it inclusive to different learning styles. With the absence of illustrations, imagination is fostered as the children are forced to create their own mental images of the characters and events boosting creativity and critical thinking (Agosto, 2016). This is seen in GTB's story when I closed the book and asked the children to picture the living in the house. Additionally, when adults model quality talk and encourage group discusses the children are prompted to reason, engage in social collaboration and in doing so enhance their language skills. This builds confidence in communication, which is fundamental for future learning and social participation, aligning with the Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group document (2021) which aims to improve oracy in education.

Vygotsky's 'Sociocultural Theory' emphasizes the importance of social interaction in children's learning and development, suggesting children learn through dialogue and interactions with others. He argues that language plays a critical role in cognitive development by helping children construct meaning and understanding of their environment to become active members of their communities (MacBlain, 2022). Vygotsky's concept of the 'Zone of Proximal Development' aligns well with storytelling, as it demonstrates how adults provide linguistic scaffolding to support their learning. For example, while reading 'GTB', I asked "How do you think the bears felt?" they are encouraged to think about cause and effect, consequences, and empathy, helping them grasp ideas they might not fully understand on their own.

Bruner (MacBlain, 2022) suggests that children make sense of the world through narratives and considers those who have had language scaffolded from a young age at an advantage to those who have not, believing words are key to learning. Storytelling directly aligns with his 'Constructivist Theory' as each mode of representation play a distinct role in shaping how children engage with stories and use language. During the 'Enactive Mode' babies will engage with storybooks by physically touching, pointing, bouncing or clapping while listening to their rhythm. In the 'Iconic Mode', they explore pictures, linking the images to the represented words. The 'Symbolic Mode' is the child's ability to listen to a story and independently conjure up images of their meaning. Through listening to stories, questioning and predicting, children learn that there is a beginning, middle and end and become equipped to create their own narratives, fostering early writing skills.

Effects of Storytelling Deprivation

However, not all children benefit from storytelling. In the United Kingdom, 76% of children aged five to seven use a tablet (Ofcom, 2024), yet only 24% are read to daily (Readly, 2016). Poverty significantly impacts access to storytelling, contributing to delayed speech and literacy skills. Children from low-income families often lack access to books in the home. Parents may have multiple jobs, long working hours, or high stress, leaving them with less time and energy to read to their children. They themselves may also have limited literacy skills (Merga, 2017). Research shows children from disadvantaged backgrounds hear 30 million fewer words by aged three to that of their affluent peers creating a 'Word Gap' for when they start school. This absence of vocabulary and communication skills in early childhood can trigger a domino effect in later life. Children with speech delays can struggle with phonemic awareness, reading and writing which leads to lower academic achievement, dropping out of school and turning to crime. The levels of 'Developmental Language Disorder' are six times higher among young people in prison for criminal offences (NIHR, 2021). Reading GTB, I used fast-mapping to introduce the word 'intrigued' to add to the children's vocabulary bank.

Traditional

Traditional storytelling engages children verbally and visually. This method relies heavily on the adult's ability to maintain engagement through effective language use. Prosodic features such as stress, pitch, intonation, pauses, pace and vocal effects are essential for conveying meaning, create excitement and focus attention on key narratives (Barbee, 2020). For example, in Goldilocks when the bears return home, I slowed down and paused to create a sense of anticipation. Additionally, varying pitch and intonation for characters, such as a deep, gruff voice for Daddy Bear and a softer, warmer tone for Mummy Bear, captures the children's imagination and brings the characters to life, enhancing their engagement with the story. Puppetry, as I used at the beginning, integrates prosody with physical interaction, further enhancing engagement, language acquisition, and cognitive development (Luen, 2021). By capturing children's interests they are more motivated to listen and understand the story, enhancing cognitive engagement which has been linked to improving literacy (Agosto, 2016). Confidence in language use is also strengthened when children use the puppets to tell stories to their peers.

Cultural differences in storytelling approaches also influence children's literacy skills. Luo *et al* (2014) explored how mother-child book sharing styles influence children's literacy skills and storytelling abilities in later life. For instance, in Mexican culture the mother highlights emotions, interacts and asks thought provoking questions. In contrast, Chinese mothers often focus more on the negative consequences in narratives. The research concludes that book-sharing supports early literacy across all cultures, but children gain stronger storytelling and literacy skills when parents offer two-way questioning that encourages deeper thinking and language use. Similarly, Marjanovič-Umek *et al* (2012) suggests the family environment, opportunity for joint

reading and the parents' level of education significantly impacts children's language development. Children with parents of higher levels of education have a more expansive vocabulary and developed writing skills.

Digital

Over the last two decades, digital story telling has established itself as an alternative to traditional forms, incorporating videos, illustrations, 3D objects and animations. These elements are designed to enhance children's interaction and immersion through features such as sliding text, spinning images, and audio. User- initiated actions such as clickable elements and hover features give an interactive component children can do at their own pace (Cardello, 2022). My digital version of 'Dear Zoo' offers an interactive layer where children listen to sounds, tap the screen and reveal animals. This interactive engagement encourages children to participate fully in the experience, leading to deeper learning through sensory immersion. This activity teaches cause-and-effect relationships and introduces children to the use of digital devices aligning with the Digital Competence Framework (2021) designed to promote digital skills, knowledge and confidence in technology for children between three to sixteen. Several additional learning needs, including hearing impairment, dyslexia, autism, and ADHD, are linked to language and literacy delay. Traditional storytelling may not always meet the needs of these children, or where English is a second language, as it relies on verbal communication. Children with hearing impairments may miss language cues, and those with ADHD struggle to focus on activities for long periods. Digital storytelling, however, increases sensory engagement with visual cues and audio, sign language and immediate feedback. On reflection, while reading 'Dear Zoo' digitally I could have included sign along actions for the animals for the children to mimic, to add an interactive element to the story telling experience. The negative impacts of devices however are overstimulation, dependency and limiting imagination.

Research

Aldbashi (2021) study on digital storytelling for primary school children found mixed outcomes. While digital storytelling increased motivation, concentration, retention of information, and critical thinking, it had little impact on improving the children's story-writing abilities or digital advancement. Bowcutt's (2013) dissertation compared infants' responses to traditional and e-book storytelling. Results indicating that the infants showed little difference in response to the two formats however it was the change in behaviour of the adults which was significant, as they showed less engagement to the e-books due to being unfamiliar to the device and being distracted by it. According to UK Parliament (2020) screens can have both positive and negative effects on cognitive development depending on the quality of activities involved. Although, Karani's *et al* (2022) scoping review suggests the negative influences outweigh the positive when there is excessive unsupervised use. Younger children experiencing delays in speech acquisition because they struggle to learn words and

concepts effectively through screens compared to real-life interactions. An experiment conducted in Norway in 2015 with 1,139 ten-year-olds compared their reading comprehension on paper versus digitally and found that they performed better on paper, with nearly a third scoring higher on paper than on the digital test (Stole *et al*, 2020).

With the growing use of devices, it is not only children's screen time that affects their development but also their parents'. As parents become engrossed in their own devices, they create 'semi-silent' environments, reducing opportunities for children to hear new words, practice sentence structures, and develop language skills (Morris *et al*, 2022). Also with the decline in traditional parent-child story time comes diminished benefits such as bonding, warmth, attachment, and the opportunity to learn through eye contact, facial expressions, and "motherese" (Brainsights, 2011). Aligned with Vygotsky's concept of enculturation, these interactions are crucial for a child's cognitive and emotional growth, as they foster social and cultural learning through close, meaningful exchanges that enhance language development and cultural understanding (Pound, 2005).

Source Evaluation

Alderbashi's (2021) study showed digital storytelling benefits critical thinking but had no impact on writing skills. This research however may not be dependable as even though based on ninety-nine children they were children from private schools so may not reflect the broader society. While Bowcutt's (2013) study on infants' reactions to e-books versus traditional lacked reliability due to its small sample size of only three children. In contrast, Karani's *et al* (2022) scoping review, based on 12 articles, offers a more reliable source of data, emphasizing that unsupervised screen time often leads to negative effects, including speech delay.

Conclusion

Storytelling, both traditional and digital, play a key role in fostering children's language, literacy, and cognitive development. Traditional methods such as Goldilocks and the Three Bears, encourage imagination and social interaction, while digital storytelling, such as Dear Zoo, offers interactive experiences aligned with modern digital literacy. The significance of both however is the adult's ability to engage the child and scaffold learning. Ultimately, both traditional and digital storytelling can be effective, but the adult's role in guiding and enriching the experience is crucial.

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