

Storytelling is a powerful tool for early years children. Not only does it entertain, but it plays a vital role in children's cognitive, emotional, and social development.

Researchers Yabe et al (2018) and theorist Maria Montessori argue that whether in the form of traditional paperbacks or digital formats, storytelling fosters children's imagination, language development, social interaction and literacy skills. As well as fosters cultural understanding and imagination in children (Kulikow, 2022).

Through storytelling, children are exposed to new words, ideas, experiences and concepts such as numbers, letters and colours (Lewis, 2023).

Moreover, storytelling also promotes memory sharpness, concentration skills, critical thinking skills and active listening skills. By listening to stories, children learn to focus their attention on the narrative and follow sequences (Farantika, Shofwan, and Purwaningrum, 2022).

In recent years, digital literacy has become an integral part of education, including early years education. As technology continues to advance, so does the importance of equipping children with the skills to navigate the digital landscape (Scott and Marsh, 2018).

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice and manipulate phonemes in spoken words. This awareness is crucial for oral language and reading development. Phonological awareness can be supported through reading rhyming books and emphasising the rhyming words as they are read (Brown, 2014).

During the First activity, there was a strong emphasis on rhyming patterns and pointing to each word on the page. According to Researcher Mordsley (2017), rhyming and rhythmic structure aids children to remember and retain words.

A study by Read, Macaulay and Furay (2014) supports this and states that rhyming stories can strengthen children's vocabulary as well as benefit word retention. The study also found that children were able to memorise the rhyming books and complete the sentences. This gave them feelings of confidence. The ability to predict and participate in the book-reading because of the rhyme, made the experience more

enjoyable. Children would engage more and so the benefits of reading were heightened.

However, this is contradicted by a study published by Stover (2015) who found that teaching children different reading strategies (rhyme or repeated exposure), did not enhance literacy performance.

Whitehead (2007) states that a child's first word forms from listening, observing and experimenting with sounds. Whitehead (2007) goes on to state newborn babies are more attentive to voices and facial expressions. As a result, reading stories from a young age gives children what they need to develop their language.

Theorist David Crystal highlights the importance of rhyme and rhythm in language acquisition. He believed that rhythmic patterns and melodic qualities found in rhymes, poems and signs can greatly assist in the development of phonological awareness and language skills in early childhood (Crystal, 1996). Theorist Jean Piaget also believed that reading stories and using rhyming patterns to children in the preoperational stage can stimulate their cognitive development and language acquisition (Uysal and Yavuz, 2015).

In contrast, theorist Noam Chomsky has a different perspective on language acquisition. Where Piaget believed that children progress through different specific stages in language development that mirror their development (Westin, No date), Chomsky argued that children have an innate capacity for language and so children are biologically predisposed to learn any language to which they are exposed (Legg, 2019).

Moreover, Pointing to each word in the book was also shown in the first activity. According to Meltzer (2020), pointing to each word on the page while reading aloud serves multiple purposes. It helps children connect the spoken word with the written word. It also teaches children to read left to right. The act of pointing also encourages active participation and engagement, as children can follow along, developing their tracking skills and an attention focus (Marzi, et al, 2020). This is supported by Colonnese, Stams, Koster and Noom (2010) who conducted a study that found a relation between the pointing gesture and the emergence of language.

This aligns with Noam Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar and the Language Acquisition. This theory follows the idea that pointing during storytelling can be beneficial for language and cognitive development in children. Even though Chomsky's theory focuses primarily on the internal cognitive processes involved in language acquisition, it recognises that children learn language through interaction with their environment and experiential learning. Pointing during storytelling can be seen as an external aid that helps children understand language and its structures (Baxter, 2022). Similarly, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development also aligns with this idea as it emphasises the importance of guidance and social interaction in a child's learning and development (Cherry, 2022). Although Vygotsky himself did not specifically mention pointing when storytelling, his ideas align with the idea that pointing can be beneficial to storytelling. By using pointing as a tool, adults can scaffold a child's understanding of the story, making it more accessible and aiding their cognitive and language development.

In addition, Vygotsky's theory and his emphasis of interaction and social engagement in children's learning process can be linked with the use of eye contact, appropriate body language and facial expressions within the first activity.

According to Gov.Uk (No date), adults should be enthusiastic and exaggerate movements to ensure the children find the storytelling enjoyable. This is supported by Mokhtar, Halim and Kamarulzaman (2011) who agrees with this approach as well as states that telling stories in this form is essential to ensure the children are engaged, and remember the facts of the story.

Isik (2016) states that one of the main foundations for learning language is repetition. Children learn by repeating what they have learned and remembered. In order for children to maintain attention, retain and recall a storybook, it is important for the storytelling experience to be fun and engaging (Sargent, 2018).

Marcin (2020) also states that when reading to children, adults should make the experience fun by using different voices, and using dramatic facial expressions to make the story come to life. Emotive expressions should be included throughout to teach children emotions and how to handle them. Books can be reflected on real life experiences. Theorist Howard Gardner further emphasises the significance of facial expressions and body language in storytelling as a way of portraying emotions, giving children a better understanding of them (Main, 2023).

In the second activity, the book explored dilemmas of life as well as contained emotional aspects. This helps the children develop empathy as they are connected with the characters emotions. It also encouraged critical thinking as they analyse the choices and outcomes of the story. Ultimately, the story gave the children new language, concepts and moral lessons (Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018).

This is further supported by Theorist Bettelheim who emphasised the importance of books that help children navigate and understand complex emotions, fears and challenges. Through these stories, children can explore and make sense of their own experiences and emotions (Kakutani, 1989).

Furthermore, according to Medlicott (2019), effective storytelling involves the consideration of the unique requirements of each child. For instance, it is crucial to ensure that a child with autism, impaired vision or hearing is considered during the storytelling session. In the second activity, the use of sign language was incorporated into the digital storytelling. When reading a digital story book, sign language can be performed whilst the video book plays. This provides a synchronised experience. With a paper book, having to generally hold the book and flip the pages makes it challenging to perform sign language. The digital format allows for a more seamless integration of sign language alongside the story which is an advantage to digital formats.

Performing sign language in the second activity was a good introduction of the language. More than 48,000 children in the UK are deaf. Ensuring children have an understanding of sign language can make a huge impact on a deaf person's life; giving them the confidence to communicate more which as a result, improves their literacy skills (BBC, 2017).

It is also notable that due the rising number of sign language users in the UK, learning sign language from a young age unlocks communication barriers (Brentyn, 2022). Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams (2013) agrees with this and states that bilinguals are more advantaged when it comes to social understanding due to having different language knowledge.

Larrazabal (2023) states that children who learn sign language tend to develop speaking and language skills faster than those who don't. Studies have also indicated that children who acquire sign language tend to have higher IQ scores than those who do not learn sign language. Additionally, these children often perform well in various aspects of cognitive development, including spatial awareness, memory, and attention. This is further supported by theorists who support multilingualism and bilingual education, such as Jim Cummins, who argues that learning multiple languages, including sign language, enhances cognitive development, linguistic flexibility, and overall language skills in children (Cummins, 1976).

On the contrary, Marian and Shook (2012) suggests that there are cognitive consequences of bilingualism. It is explained that when a bilingual person uses one language, the other is activated at the same time. This co-activation is an automatic response and can cause linguistic competition, resulting in language difficulties.

The digital format of the book introduces the children to the digital medium, contributing to their digital literacy. In Wales, the Digital Competence Framework encourages the early introduction of digital tools to prepare students for the increasingly digital world. The digital story can help children become familiar with digital devices, navigation, and basic digital literacy skills.

The use of the Digital Competence Framework in Wales provides a structured approach to integrating digital literacy into early years education. It offers guidelines for educators to ensure that children are exposed to the appropriate digital experiences, which align with their developmental stage and promote safe and responsible use of technology (Welsh Government, 2018). However, there are challenges faced with this framework. Edwards (2019) states that a common challenge includes connectivity issues. Marsh et

al (2017 cited in Daniels, et al, 2020), also believes that there is a big possibility that early years teachers are not fully equipped and supported to use digital methods for teaching.

On the other hand, a study by Ricci et al (2023), found that too much digital exposure can have negative impacts on children. Children who use a high frequency of digital and internet use can be associated with a decrease in verbal intelligence. Digital media can also disrupt adult-child interaction. According to Gov.Uk (No date), interactions between adults and children can have an impact on a child's communication and language skills. Nonetheless, Ricci et al (2023) goes on to state that there are also positive impacts including the promotion of hand-eye coordination, introduction to reading, language and science. Hand-eye coordination is especially essential for writing skills (DeYoung, No date).

In conclusion, effective storytelling in early years education plays a pivotal role in nurturing children's development and fostering their literacy skills. The two activities examined in this analysis, one involving a paperback book and the other a digital story, each offer unique advantages. Paperback storytelling emphasises traditional literacy skills, such as phonological awareness and print awareness, while engaging children through rhyming patterns and word pointing. While the digital story introduces children to the digital medium, enhancing their digital literacy skills as well as introducing sign language. These approaches align with key theories in developmental psychology. Future practitioners should prioritise accommodating the diverse needs and learning styles of children, ensuring high quality interactions that nurture their literacy skills.

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