

Introduction

Storytelling provides psychological and educational benefits as children begin to enhance their imagination, visualise spoken words, improve and explore new vocabulary, as well as refining their communication skills. Storytelling and reading books to children expands and enriches the world around them as they grow (BBC, 2024) and (Yabe, M., *et al.*, no date).

Within the early years of a child's life, storytelling can be vital for the child's development. Storytelling can help children develop their knowledge and understanding of sounds, words and language as well as developing upon early literacy skills.

According to Farantika, Shofwan, Purwaningrum (2022) storytelling “helps the physical and spiritual growth and development of children in readiness to enter further education” (Shofwan, 2021). Storytelling enables children to develop good behaviour, simulates and grows imagination, critical and creative attitude, builds self-confidence as well as training concentration skills and language skills as they learn new vocabulary. Storytelling builds and improves their early reading, writing and speaking skills, as hearing or reading a story helps children understand the meaning of new vocabulary through different context.

As children grow into a digital age, technology can be a vital tool to use when children are hearing or reading a story. Technology can play a role in supporting early communication, language and literacy. Using technology as a learning tool can be shown through eBooks, or apps (National Literacy Trust, 2017).

Main body

Language and Literacy within the early years of a child's life is vital. As practitioners read books physically or digitally, language and literacy begin to develop. However, there are many advantages and disadvantages to both types of reading. Reading books digitally can be more convenient to access, they can include audio which can entice the children to concentrate on the story itself, as well as some being interactive, which can encourage children to get involved with the use of ‘hotspots’, these can be used to enhance the child's learning and understanding as the reading is taking place. Whereas, reading physical books to children can boost intelligence, improve comprehension skills, as questions are more likely to

be asked and answered, as well as building vocabulary and facilitating connections between peers in the classroom (Twinkl, 2022) and (Booksource, 2024).

However, reading eBooks with or to children may distract them from the reading itself, if sound effects or audio is overpowered. EBooks, or reading with technology may cause screen fatigue, or eye strain. Reading through the use of technology can make the individual reliant on the power of a device. Whereas, according to BookTrust (2024) reading physical books can take time. Research suggests that 20% of parents do not read with their child(ren) due to not having the time. Physical books can also cost money that some parents/carers do not have, as well as parents lacking confidence to read successfully to a child. Within an early years setting, some children can find it difficult to concentrate while a practitioner or an adult is reading naturally depending on their age, however techniques can be put into place to avoid this negative impacts, for example props, expressions to tones and costumes.

As shown in previous videos, reading a book digitally can have a positive impact on children's literacy skills as stories presented through multimedia can support and strengthen a child's understanding of the story. Technology can help promote language and literacy development through communication, role play and engaging with children from different backgrounds including the support of multilingualism (ILT Education, 2023).

Whereas, reading a book physically can be more engaging as the opportunity to ask questions, and communicate with peers and adults become more available. Reading a physical book to children within an early years setting can be more natural, calming and approachable for the children to ask questions within the classroom environment.

Oracy

As storytelling occurs it is important for the practitioner to encourage oracy. Oracy can be promoted by a practitioner as questioning, discussions and a retell of feedback about the story can be built upon with peers or adults within the environment.

According to Voice 21 (2024), oracy can be a powerful learning tool that enables children to learn through speech. During this process, new vocabulary can be discussed in different contexts. This helps children feel more confident that they understand and have ownership of learned vocabulary. Storytelling can be a positive start to oracy and literacy sessions as it is

through hearing new language and using it in the speed that children are able to read and write it enables the children to connect the spellings to the word itself as they follow the story effectively, this works as a ‘read along’, by connecting the sounds and pronunciation to words.

“Oracy is the ability to speak eloquently, to articulate ideas and thoughts, to influence through talking, to collaborate with peers and to express views confidently and appropriately”. Oracy refers both to the development of speaking and listening skills, and the effective use of spoken language in teaching and learning (appg, 2020).

Writing

Mighty Writer (2024) and Sparkling Speech (no date) suggests that storytelling can promote writing as storytelling or/and role play can help children develop imagination, creativity and their ability to structure narratives. As a practitioner during these storytelling sessions, it is important that encouragement is being passed onto the children listening, for example providing props and costumes can help the story become engaging, as well as more interesting and eventful for the children. As this activity occurs children are starting to build upon their previous knowledge of the story and their own imagination at the same time. After this, children can form an imaginative story individually or collaboratively. This can develop a child’s writing skills by supporting children’s composition by reading stories, talking to children, re-phrasing what they have said and modelling correct sentence structure. This can support children to share their ideas and help them to develop an understanding of how sentences are formed, and how letters and sounds are written (Department for Education, no date).

For example, ‘The Gruffalo’ story promotes rhyming, includes repetitive structure and exciting illustrations. Children can retell/reenact the story using imagination, repetitive structure and rhyming vocabulary. The book encourages positional language that can be presented by the children while using props as characters, or costumes to involve peers and friends. This can depend on differentiation and to meet every individual need. Child can also write a short story using different methods, such as children can create a visual story by using a mark making technique, orthography or writing system. Stories can be presented as drawings or written in words.

Digital literacy can support writing within the early years as it can offer new learning opportunities, through different apps, or age and stage eBooks. Children can begin to understand cause and effect when using technology, as well as hand-eye coordination. Special Educational Needs (2023) suggests that digital devices can play a critical role within an early years setting, especially to help and support children with special educational needs. Digital literacy enables personal and engaging phonics lessons, provides fingertip letter formation, activities that assists with letter sounds, as well as support all forms of reading and writing. Technology becomes an adaptable approachable to teaching literacy skills to children within the early years by providing phonics, sounds, letter formation, blending and segmenting effectively. This can be a fun, and engaging way for children to learn a variety of skills to match and meet each individual child's needs, with or without special educational needs.

Reading

According to raisingchildren.net.au (2024) reading and storytelling can be one of the most important developmental stages of a child's early childhood. Reading and storytelling can help children distinguish the knowledge of sounds, words and language as they develop early literacy skills, it can spark imagination and curiosity. Storytelling can promote a child's brain development, ability to concentrate, build social, communication and emotional skills, as well as them learning about the world around them, their own culture and other cultures.

According to Curriculum for Wales (2015) children within an early years setting should start to apply phonic strategies, recognise some high-frequency words, and notice repetition in text at the age of five years old. Whereas, as the children begin to grow and develop within their areas of reading children should start applying self-correction, including re-reading and reading ahead and build upon their prior knowledge from previous books and words learnt.

As adults are reading to children it is important to include facial expressions, eye contact, expressive tones and different sounds for different characters, this helps and encourages the children's interest and makes it more enjoyable and fun for the children to listen to. Reading and storytelling with children can help them feel safe, feel a sense of belonging and build upon their own self-esteem.

However, according to Merga (2017) some parents have concerns about their own literacy skills, they feel uncomfortable to read aloud to their children, lack confidence and experience to fully explore reading to entice their children.

As children capture the storytelling sessions through technology, ‘hotspots’ on a digital device can encourage engagement and positivity to the child. Providing children with props and costumes can also engage the children to participate in the story being read, or their own story made up by their imagination. This can also help children communicate and develop positive relationships with their friends, peers and practitioners around them. Digital literacy can promote reading as text-to-speech and speech-to-text can demonstrate pronunciation, visual cues and different voice overs. This can help children hear different accents, as well as words used in a different context.

However, using technology to promote reading is not always a positive outcome. As shown in previous videos, YouTube can be an ideal platform for practitioners to use when reading a book digitally but adverts on this website can have a negative impact and may not always be age appropriate for the children within your care. Using technology may be seen as excessive screen time, as well as children not having as much opportunity to interact, communicate or question about the story as the digital platform flows and may not be at a natural speed (Bedrock Learning, 2024).

When reading with or to children, rhyming can be a catchy tune or fun verse to entice children to enhance their essential reading skills, including phonological awareness, vocabulary and listening comprehension. Rhyming is one of a child’s first gateways to the world of language and literacy. When children engage with imaginative rhymes, they develop early reading skills that can set them up for life. Rhyming, such as nursery rhymes make an idea tool to promote fluent reading, extending vocabulary, and nurturing the connections of words. For example, in the book ‘The Gruffalo’, rhyming is a repetitive sequence within the story, this can help the children build the connections and notice words that have the same sounds. This can be shown as decoding the letters with their corresponding sounds for pronunciation, pre-requisites and self-actualisation (LexiaUK, 2024).

“Children who read regularly before they enter school are more likely to learn language faster, enter school with a larger vocabulary and become more successful readers” (Bus et al., 1995; Mot et al., 2008). Reading is vital at the early years of a child’s life, reading sets children up for a lifetime in all areas of development and helps children meet their full potential (The Open University, 2024).

Conclusion

In conclusion, language and literacy within the digital age is continuously growing with the children in the care of practitioners, every day. There are a huge amount benefits when using technology for learning, reading, writing and storytelling. However, it is vital that practitioners use this appropriately and do not lose the traditional ways of storytelling completely. Physically reading a book to children has different advantages compared to digital reading, both types are effective and could be used together or separately. As a result of this, storytelling and reading sets children up for life and is a vital milestone that every child should have the opportunity to achieve.

I confirm that I have not used any Artificial Intelligence tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

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ECEY5004 – Language and Literacy in the Digital Age (2 videos and 2,000-word assignment)

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