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Language and Literacy in the digital era.

Aprianti et al (2023) and Niklas, Cohrsen and Tayler (2016) suggest that reading stories to children in the earliest stages of their life plays an important part in their early development with suggested benefits including supporting the stimulation of their mind and sparking curiosity whilst building their self-esteem and supporting the crucial early development of vocabulary. Jalongo et al. (2002) state that by introducing storytelling at a young age, newborns and young children's literacy development is aided by an understanding that enables them to transmit the meaning of words by connecting pictures to the words.

Garton and Pratt (2004, pp 213-228) are in agreement with Lucas (2014) and state storytelling within the early years plays a fundamental part in a child's development strengthening their cognitive abilities as well as exposing them to a range of vocabulary developing their love for reading which also creates a further love for writing. Chasse (2011) elaborates further and suggests parents to be should share storytimes with their unborn child during the time in the womb, explaining the baby becomes familiar with the voices spoken especially by the mother and states this is the first step in fostering a secure attachment between both whilst supporting the future development of early language skills. Frude and Killick (2011) state that according to Bowlby's attachment theory, storytelling by a crucial attachment figure is highly effective, and storytelling may deepen attachment connections in significant ways. Choo, Abdullah and Nowi (2020) suggest that oral storytelling otherwise known as traditional storytelling is a potent device that some claim dates back thousands of years. A powerful way of delivering a story with nothing other than the reader, the audience and the way in which the reader chooses to deliver the story to enhance the curiosity and imagination of the children listening to support the visualization of the words spoken. Although Reese (2013, p15) believes such a way of storytelling is seen as impractical as the view of children sitting quietly to listen to a story without being curious and asking questions is a nostalgic way of viewing children from generations centuries ago. Rahiem (2021) agrees and holds the belief that through offering digital storytelling opportunities, children can interact with the reader, making the experience more engaging and interactive, by using a variety of digital technologies in addition to the reader's voice to assist in creating an entertaining and theatrical experience. However, Pelin (2011) contends that worries

about teachers' and practitioners' expertise using digital technologies may function as a barrier to the potential efficacy of such a storytime delivery.

Motamedi, Murgiano and Perniss (2021) suggest this by employing onomatopoeic language, as seen in the video's usage of the sounds by the storyteller such as "splish splash" and "squelch squerch." The use of a high level of engagement, when children tune into the verbal words spoken together with the sounds and visualization, is supportive of young children's speech and language development. As cited by Asmaa (2017) Behrens (2006) disagrees and believes onomatopoeia is irrelevant and meaningless in comparison to the conventional words infants form in the early stages of speech and language development. Hulin (2014) supports this further and states imitation theory founded by theorist Skinner, implies that children only learn language skills through listening to those around them and mimicking that of the language spoken around them. However as cited by McLaughlin (2010) Chomsky's theory of language states that all children have the ability to learn any language, further stating children do not copy just the language spoken around them and through a language acquisition device are capable of learning any new language. Bruner's interaction theory shares similar views and believes children are capable of learning any language around them but further believes this is only possible through high interactions with others stating interactions between children and others are crucial during language development (Bruner, 2004).

Fecia and O'Neil (2010) imply that storytelling is not just told by the storyteller's voice but by their body movement and gestures also. Reis (2023) is in agreement and further states that, as demonstrated by the storyteller while presenting the digital story, hand gestures, also known as beat gestures, not only allow the storyteller to add emphasis to the story but also support audience retention of information and language development in early communicators. Liang, Chang and Kazmi (2017) also share similar views and suggest through the use of gestures such as powerful expressions, hand gestures and eye contact, emotions of the story and visual images are able to be created by the audience allowing them to engage in a deeper involvement with the story thus shown by the storyteller whilst sharing a digital story. However Tiffany, Regina and Wardah (2020) and Silviyanti et al. (2023) share similar opinions and state, not all storytellers have the confidence to share such expressions during telling and story both traditionally and digitally and one particular barrier to this is a lack of confidence and therefore during storytelling may display lack of eye contact, expression, use of gestures and little effort to promote the role of the storyteller in ways that may include the use of props or dressing up. In addition to the above skills discussed and seen used by the storyteller, it is also recognized that the storyteller uses a high level of repetition throughout the stories to support the early skills of language acquisition in children.

As cited by Cohen, Prendergast and Estrovitz (2013) believes as children learn rhymes and songs through repetition of listening to these, stories should be used in the same way, allowing children to repick their favourite story over and over again as through the important repetition crucial language acquisition is happening. Further findings concluded from a recent study conducted by Horst et al. (2011a) discovered that through reading chosen stories repeatedly, children learned more new words than those who had chosen continuous different stories (Horst, 2011). Fallon,

Holzen and Newman (2020) elaborate further and suggest after just one storybook reading session with an adult, successful receptive word learning occurred when target words were repeated with children aged three years old, supporting the theory that storytelling with young children encourages early receptive word learning. According to Rokni and Qarajeh (2014), stories have been used for centuries by both adults and children to support the development of their vocabulary, language knowledge, and grammar. However, they also stress that reading aloud stories by an adult is an important part of the development of further comprehension skills. Ukwuoma (2014) suggests in the traditional manner of oral storytelling as displayed by the storyteller, they can be seen in a sitting position. This manner of storytelling is thought to offer less distractions.

However Sipe (2008) believes this is an unrealistic view of storytelling and those who are intune with a child's development along with their individual needs will appreciate and foster their curiosity and their need to ask questions during the storytelling. Nonetheless, Macdonald (2014) contends that a barrier is created while narrating a story while sitting still and using minimal body movement to accentuate and arouse the listener. Roos (2022) suggests that during story telling all parts of the body should be used as well as the space around you, stating through the use of all of the body the audience are able engage on a higher level as you fully communicate. Bernhardt (2021) believes that as shown by the storyteller setting a virtual nature scene whilst storytelling promotes social connectedness and allows the audience to feel fully engaged and involved through the use of digital storytelling. This was noted to be crucial during times of apparent loneliness such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Mielonen (2009) states that both researchers and theorists such as Montessori and Vgotsky agree that children's language and literacy emerge from a child's early years and the engagement they experience that promote such developing skills.

Welsh Government (2022) states that as displayed by the storyteller, creating engaging opportunities to foster children's love for stories has rich benefits for their literacy and language development, such as introducing sounds, words whilst promoting positive brain development. This is echoed in the literacy and numeracy framework stated within the curriculum for Wales further stating phonological and phonemic awareness can be developed through engaging storytimes, supporting children to reach particular outcomes such as I can distinguish, manipulate, and play with sounds in my environment and words and showing an independent interest in books being able to hold the book the correct way up whilst turning the pages and will start to make meaning of the pictures shown (Welsh Government, 2021). However, studies conducted by Maureen, Meij and Jong (2022) suggest that standardized tests to determine the level of early literacy development from both traditional and digital storytelling determined that there were equally strong results amongst both sets of learners. Munoz (2019) suggests storytelling has always been a powerful tool in children's language and literacy development, but over the last several years there has been an emphasis placed on the teaching of digital literacy in the early years. United Nations Children's Fund (1989) states this is as digital literacy is a growing part of the world therefore crucial children are supported in developing such skills in order to support the preparation for school, work and skills that will enable brighter adolescents. National Literacy Trust (2019) elaborates

further and states as digital literacy grows, children can be supported further in their language, literacy and numeracy development with the use of apps, ebooks and learning programs vastly available for children making it convenient to learn at any time and anywhere. However, Deweese (2014) asks the question of how much time on screens such as iPads is too much and further asks do such times have detrimental effects on their social and emotional well-being.

Welsh Government (2018) introduced digital competence framework guidance which outlines that all schools and settings have a responsibility to ensure all learners develop a vision that fully supports their development of digital competence. This is also highlighted within the curriculum for non-maintained settings with clear guidance that practitioners must ensure children are given plenty of opportunities to explore their digital skills and knowledge through continuous daily provision in order to be informed capable learners (Welsh Government, 2021). Written in a recent report during an inspection at a non-maintained setting Estyn (2023) highlighted such ways that children were supported in promoting their digital skills during daily practice. These were witnessed in the form of the use of an iPad to further explore habitats of animals, the use of digital cameras to explore interests further and talking tiles where the children accessed instructions by pressing digital tiles. However, in a report written by Aubrey and Dahl (2008), barriers to supporting children's digital competence were reported as practitioners' lack of confidence when using a range of digital tools and a lack of confidence in using ICT to plan for the children's next steps. Flood, Heath and Lapp (2008) suggest that practitioners should not overcomplicate digital storytelling to begin with and point out a digital story can be told in an easy format such as still images and further state several sites now available in order to support those who lack confidence in creating digital stories with a step by step guide.

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