

I acknowledge using Grammarly (<https://grammarly.com/>) on October 26, 2024, to check my already completed work. This program was on my computer and automatically prompted suggestions on Microsoft Word.

I acknowledge using Copilot ([Microsoft Copilot in Bing](#)) on the following dates with the following prompts.

AI Prompts on 16/10/2024

- What are the benefits of storytelling in the early years?

AI prompts on 13/10/2024

- Bruno Bettelheim sources
- Expressive Language research in the early years
- Jean Piaget's theory source

AI Prompts on 18/10/2024

- Please search up-to-date sources and researchers post 2014 on Storytelling in the early years.

AI Prompt on 22/10/2024

- Please give me early years theorists that support Repetition and Rhythm in the early years

AI Prompts on 23/10/2024

- What can enhance storytelling engagement?

I do not have a draft of my work as I did not write anything before these prompts. I just used these prompts to help me understand the resources I was reading and researching other recent sources.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI-generated text as my work. I hold drafts of all prompts used in Copilot and draft work before using Grammarly in my final draft.

Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

Reflection

Introduction

Storytelling traditionally has been perceived as a learning opportunity that supports the foundation skills for children's vocabulary and literacy development (Cekaite and Björk-Willén, 2018). White (2022) suggests that adults and children reading books together can support their listening comprehension, memory, vocabulary, and narrative telling and retelling stories. Furthermore, Essential Resources (2023) believes that storytelling effectively increases a child's vocabulary, grammar, understanding of stories and sentence structure that helps the child learn to read.

According to Salma (2024) storytelling allows children to listen to stories exposing them to a wide range of vocabulary and the understanding to read from left to right, turning pages which are foundation skills for reading and writing. Dubiel (2024) says that children's acquisition of extended language is received predominantly orally in the early years of development.

The benefits of digital storytelling have been recognised to enhance engagement, participation, and content comprehension with early years children (Robin, 2018). Similarly, Smeda *et al* (2014) also suggest that children's engagement is enhanced when digital storytelling captures their interests with a combination of images, audio, and enjoyable visual interactions. In addition, Kucirkova (2018) believes that digital storytelling includes varied language and interactive elements to expand children's vocabulary and language skills.

Main Body

The story presented was *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson. Three storytelling behaviours noticed were directing the attention of engagement such as pointing and allowing the children to participate in the storytelling process (Bowkett 2016). The storyteller used different ranges of expressive language using varied voices, facial expressions, and gestures to bring the story to life (Oxford Owl, 2016) and the use of repetitive and rhythmic storytelling (Bowkett 2016).

The storyteller read the *Gruffalo* story and at the beginning, she requested all children to turn their ears on and focus their attention to make them ready to listen to the story. Montero (2020) suggests that if you are expecting the child to listen, take part, and engage it is beneficial to use different tones and gestures to communicate the story and attract the attention of children. The storyteller gestured listening by putting her

hands to her ear whilst asking the children 'Are we ready? ears on please.' Throughout the story there were opportunities for the storyteller to explore the emotions of all the characters. At least once the characters showed a sense of fear towards the idea of a Gruffalo in the woods, even the mouse when it came face to face with him. At this point, the storyteller changed her voice to mirror this fear of the characters. Bruno Bettelheim saw storytelling as an opportunity to explore different emotions and process experiences to link them to their fears and find their inner strengths (Philo 2023). The Gruffalo story contains a moral showing children that with the power of imagination, wit, and bravery you can avoid danger and outsmart bigger and scarier things (Book Brief, 2024).

Whitehead (2009) describes actions like tones of voice, gestures and actions as non-verbal communication that helps children from babies to prepare for speech and underpins the use of our spoken language. The nonverbal facial expressions expressed by the storyteller are strong before and after spoken words of the fear of the characters. In addition, the storyteller adapted to softer tones of voice when the setting of The Gruffalo became relaxed and showed the feeling when all was quiet in the deep dark wood. Gestures were made with the use of both hands being brought to the face and hid behind them to show how emotions of fears can be expressed. Heart-Mind Online (n.d.) suggests that showing emotion through voice, facial expressions and gestures helps children identify and label their own feelings. In other words, children seeing that everyone and everything experiences these types of emotions gives them the confidence to express their own emotions. Brooks (2022) points out that this process helps build up their emotional vocabulary and enhance their empathy and social skills. Hwb (2019) suggests that adults should encourage children to understand and communicate the meanings of words they hear and be able to express them.

During the story, there were pauses to allow children to engage in their interpretation of the feelings being expressed by the characters in the book. There was an opportunity here where the storyteller could have asked open questions to the children like, 'How do you think the Fox, Owl and Snake feel towards Gruffalo and Mouse?' This can allow the children to present their own interpretation of feelings of fear or worry towards unfamiliar animals and characters. When adults read stories with gestures and practice them with children it helps expand vocabulary and reinforce the association between words and their meanings (Stronger Practice Hubs, 2023). The Welsh Government (n.d.) suggests that children's language skills are connected holistically with their educational success, making sense of verbal and visual signs for reading and writing.

The storyteller at times used isolated finger-pointing and full-body gestures to direct the attention of the children towards the story and meanings of words. This looks easier for the storyteller when the story is a digital story as it frees up the hands of the

adult and they can play out more of the story visually. When directing the story's attention through pointing, it makes it easier to build and retrieve the knowledge of spoken words to illustration in the book (Ellrodt, 2022). Alongside the pointing, the storyteller allowed time for the children to join in and finish the sentences.

InstructionalDesign.org, (2018) suggests that engaging children with dialogue and implementing a role to interact socially supports language development (Instructional Design, 2018). According to Care Learning (2024), Piaget's theory suggests that children explore the world by looking, touching, and listening which develops their symbolic thoughts. In the story, the storyteller directed learning towards the characters and their habitats to develop their imagination and pretend food choice like 'Scrambled Fox' and 'Gruffalo Crumble.' The adult may want soft and hard toy characters of the animals approaching the mouse to support Piaget's sensory learning approach. This can then expand more of a sense of imagination to the size and texture of different animals and use vocabulary to describe the size and texture. When the mouse was hungry the storyteller made a gesture rubbing her tummy whilst saying 'Now the Mouse was hungry. Department for Education (2024) believes that incorporating gestures into storytelling can make these experiences more engaging and memorable and therefore the children can progress a love for reading books which supports language development.

It is difficult to point and make purposeful gestures whilst holding a book and turning the pages. The storyteller is restricted to the amount of visually directed attention and imaginative gestures. Next time it may be beneficial to use a book stand to free up the hands and encourage more expressive nonverbal language to support a child's memory and social interaction. Early Years Coalition (2021) says that imaginative gestures can help children understand the narrative and specific meaning to context which is fundamental in literacy development. However, the storyteller was constantly making expressive language differ at each stage of the book which really brought out the characters and emotions.

The Gruffalo story has lots of repetition and rhyme throughout which gave the storyteller lots of opportunity to engage the children with joining in telling the story. Jean Piaget's theory suggests that children's language skills evolve as they develop and that exposure from birth to nursery rhymes and soft books begins the process of repetition learning (Vickers, 2023). Furthermore, Kuppen (2018) states that rhyme and repetition spoken or sung is an opportunity for children to have fun and engage with their peers in predicting what words are coming next. The storyteller did this with the line 'There is no such thing as a Gruffalo' encouraging the children to join in with the rhyme and repetition of the story. Queensland Government (n.d.) claims that rhyming and repetition help children learn sounds, words and language formations that develop their early literacy skills. First Five Years (2019) agrees that familiar books with rhyme and

repetition are essential for language development. Lev Vygotsky's scaffolding approach provides the support and guidance to develop children's language and their social interactions (Brodie, 2024). Again, the storyteller worked well on scaffolding the guidance of participation of the children throughout the story. The storyteller could introduce the Gruffalo song by providing a continuous development of rhyme and repetition in the early years setting. This would support the progression step 1 within The Welsh Curriculum that encourages children to join in with familiar songs, rhymes and stories (Welsh Government, No Date B). Arnerich (2023) argues that adults need to keep a balance of variation with their repetition and rhyme storytelling to keep the children stimulated and interested to prevent boredom and disengagement. Furthermore, Read (2021) says that children's learning stops once they are familiar with language from a story that has been repeated continuously.

Conclusion

The module was given a reading list of material suggestions from the Trinity of Saint David's University online library. However, the first two were books that were hard back copies and not online reading material which is not easily accessible for Cardiff campus students. The research for this module was predominately done through internet search engines and AI suggestions of up-to-date sources. When highlighting keywords like 'Language and literacy in the early years' in the online library available by the University a lot exceeded the 10-year recommendations for referencing criteria. AI usually is not a preference for research for assignments however as it was made available for this module this opportunity was taken.

AI suggestions provided websites and organisations that directly support the request of the research regarding three storytelling behaviours. The Book Trust raises awareness of reading however, it also provided information directly focused on the theory and research of language and literature in the early years. This is also written clearly and to the point for the targeted audience to understand and support ways to encourage storytelling in the early years. AI also supported direct new sources regarding theorists that have not been used in previous modules which were beneficial for new more user-friendly reading.

There are multiple researchers and sources that suggest that reading stories expands the development of children's vocabulary, sentence structure and listening skills (White, 2022). However, adults need to create opportunities to keep expanding and deepen their language development as learning often stops when children are familiar with the story (Read, 2021). In addition, storytelling supports the child's ability to

sustain attention and ability to focus on something strengthening their cognition skill to progress more in language acquisition (Coursera, 2023).

Throughout the assignment, there have been suggestions on how the storyteller could enhance the story engagement. Props are found to enhance storytelling experiences with children in the early years and with The Gruffalo being a popular story the resources are available. The storyteller did well to attract the attention of the children from the first introduction by the tone and approach of saying 'All was quiet in the deep dark woods' it sounded quiet but spooky, drawing in the listener. This really supports The Welsh Curriculum's progression steps in encouraging children's imagination to creative thinking towards storytelling (Hwb, 2019). Overall, the storytelling expressed the character's tone and feelings throughout, and the storyteller spoke clearly throughout enhancing language appropriately.

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