

Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

Introduction

Language development is an essential skill, fostering social and emotional development as well as engagement in daily activities and life (Visser-Bochane, *et al.* 2020). Reading a book, singing rhymes, and talking about pictures with children from birth, supports attachment and early language and literacy skills, paving the way for future relationships with reading and promoting brain development supporting concentration (Tamer and Walsh, 2016; Raising Children Network, 2024). Furthermore, White (2022) adds stories should surround children and before birth, enabling children to learn from the stories they hear about themselves and their identity. Communication starts when babies caregivers through, gestures, contact, words or a hug connect via 'serve and return' interactions, building good foundations for communication and social skills (Harvard University, no date).

Larson and Marsh (2015) highlight the changes of literacy from the development of digital technology, in particular change in how people communicate such as, social media, print based, photo messaging and text messaging and shortening messages, changing face to face communication to asynchronous.

Erstad, *et al.* (2024) identify children from birth are now exposed to many everyday multimedia such as audio, videos, screens, and print, displaying unavoidable implications on early literacy development and how adults support children in the digital age.

Storytelling Behaviours

Rhythm (prosody), rhyme and repetition

The reader read two books by Julia Donaldson, *A Squash and a Squeeze* and *Room on the Broom*, in which the reader points out the title, the author and illustrator building awareness of the details of the story and awareness of literacy. The reader provided the children with opportunities to predict what the book is about.

Both books are both written with rhyme, rhythm, and repetition. According to Kuppen (2018) repetition and predictability make rhyming words and the rhyming text more memorable, therefore supporting active involvement from the child and this enhances their growing awareness of rhyme.

Goswami (2019) states when babies hear rhythms in speech, they learn the patterns they hear, these patterns can be the rise and fall of pitch, carrying meaning such as emotion, the meaning or intention behind the words themselves.

Moreover, rhythm enables children to take note of when words start and finish, therefore making it easier to learn the structure of language (University of Cambridge, 2023). Furthermore, Froebel's Froebelian Approach (Dyke, 2019) states children can develop language skills, coordination, and social interaction by engaging in rhythmic activities.

Rhyme, rhythm and repetition coincide to support babies and children's brains to process individual words clearly and is more memorable and enjoyable for children, therefore supporting early phonetic awareness and aiding vocabulary retention (Mordsley, 2017).

Piaget (1950) did not specifically focus on repetition in storytelling, but his theories on cognitive development highlight the importance of repetition through schemes, repeated patterns of behaviour) suggesting that repetition can help children understand and remember content (Aubrey and Riley, 2016). Conversely, Chomsky (1959) argues, repetition alone is not sufficient for language acquisition.

Intonation, facial expressions and metaphoric gestures

The reader can be seen using metaphoric gestures and facial expressions, as being overly animated, as well as using facial expressions to also show the children how the characters in the book maybe feeling. Doing so supports children to be able to interpret putting words to emotions. Facial expressions are a form of communication, showing feelings and emotions as well as how humans react to others (Chronaki, *et al.* 2015). Additionally, Marlar Lwin (2019) suggests that using metaphoric gestures and facial

expressions supports children to develop communicational skills, orally and non-verbally. Supporting CfW (2022b) developing good communicators.

Moreover, the reader also used intonation, changing pitch, tone of voice, pitch and pace. For example, when there was a question the reader raising intonation at the end of the sentence, indicates a question, where she also used descending intonation which signified a statement or conclusion. The reader is bringing emotion through the words and images and delivering it to the child making the story more engaging and understandable, thus developing their comprehension (Goswami, 2019).

Props

Froebel believed that using props supports children's understanding that objects can represent another (Dyke, 2019). The reader introduced the props of a witch's broom and a dragon. She used the broom, acted out parts, and using the broom to fly off or fall, this can provide children with positional understanding and language. Moreover, using props can be an invitation to children to retell the story, according to Piaget (1950) through dramatic play, children can develop their language by using objects and through role play and repeating stories or actions from the activity (Rees-Edwards, 2022).

The reader chose two stories appropriate for children under the age of 7 and they both provided children with rhyme, rhythm, repetition, and intonation. They provided many benefits to children's language development, such as supporting patterns in language, enhancing their memory and retention. Emotional and contextual cues were given making the story more understandable (Goswami, 2019).

The story read using the digital technology, enabled the reader to use her body more as her hands were not holding a book, the reader was able to support the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) (Welsh Government, WG, 2021b) developing an awareness of languages and incorporating an additional language, British Sign Language (BSL). Therefore, meeting the Progression Step 1 'beginning to understand that there are different languages in my environment' (Welsh Government, 2021b).

The Curriculum for Wales encourages opportunities to develop cross-curricular skills, ensuring opportunities to develop language, numeracy and digital skills (Welsh Government, 2022). Unfortunately, in this context both numeracy and digital skills were not supported. However, potentially the reader could support digital skills with a follow-on activity, recreating the story, searching for images of the animals, by giving instructions (Welsh Government, 2020).

In consideration of the use of digital technology, more animated images could have been sourced, seeing the animals walk into the room, watching the jug fall off the shelf would support children's comprehension more.

Furthermore, the reader embracing a digital book enhances language skills but also prepares children to navigate reading and digital citizen (Kucirkova, 2018).

Whereas with the traditionally read story, the readers hands are used to hold the book, and role modelling how to care for a book, supporting, The Curriculum for Wales (WG, 2021b) Progression Step 1 that child 'can enjoy books...and handle them with care.' although she introduced a few props to support some parts of the story, this could have been done with the digitally told story as there was space, and the reader was free to use the space and her hands. Furthermore, as the story book is small, placing it on a stand it would make the images harder to be seen, however, a Big Book, on a stand would bring the story alive and capture the interest and imagination of children, providing 'story time' with more of a magical experience with peers and ignite the love for reading (Big Books, 2023).

The reader was also able to build suspense, hide the pictures away from the children, building curiosity and excitement. However, before showing the children, the reader could have asked open-ended questions to ignite imagination. 'What do you think will happen next?'

Benefits of Storytelling on Children's Language and Literacy

Storytelling can help develop children's concentration span, by capturing listeners attention and enhancing their focus, as well as mental visualisation of the story therefore improving literacy skills (Agosto, 2016). Moreover, according to White (2022) research emphasises the importance and benefits storybooks have on children's oral language development when read together.

Reading story books with pictures can promote children's oracy skills, as children from the age of 2 years old, begin to listen to talk and enjoy talking about pictures in stories, whereas by 3 and 4 they start to enjoy listening to stories, developing understanding and some children will be able to develop their speech and talk by retelling stories and remembering songs (Welsh Government, 2021a). Moreover, according to Marjanovic-Umek (2012) research indicating that reading with children aged between three and six years old is particularly beneficial for a child's language and literacy development Furthermore, Aitchison (1996) states 'Humans mop up words like sponges' highlighting especially children, having the natural ability to absorb language from their environment. According to Oxford Owl (2024) children having stories read to them models good reading behaviours and supports their own journey with storytelling, learning the structures for writing later on.

Oracy is the skill of using spoken language to establish meaning, such as articulating thoughts and ideas (Payne, 2022; All-Party Parliamentary Group, 2021). Through the stories, the reader gives the children opportunities to develop their understanding for example, children may not know what a jig is, seeing the reader demonstrate the dance and encouraging the children to join in, extends the children's vocabulary and comprehension. Additionally, Vygotsky (1920) highlights the positive influence adults have reading stories, and providing rhyme and songs, supporting children's language development, through igniting creativity and inspiration, children will repeat, trial and error through their play, in particular imaginary play (Gray and MacBlain, 2015).

By using dialogic reading, by encouraging children to ask and answer questions, share their opinions, and predict what might happen next, through active participation this enhances their oracy skills (White, 2022). However, the reader could have at times

paused and offered opportunities to talk about the pictures a little more and ask questions, on the second story, Room on a Broom when the creature appeared from the bog to save the witch.

Chomsky's (1960) theory of Universal Grammar (similar structure and rules), stating humans have the innate ability to learn language and the concept of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) indicating that children are born with a biological mechanism that allows them to acquire language rules and structures with ease (Aubrey and Riley, 2016; BBC Radio 4, 2015). However, unlike spoken language, Wolf (2018, cited in Kucirkova, 2018) highlights that reading is not imbedded into children, and that adults need to model reading and provide children with opportunities to learn phonemes and text. Skinner (1957) places a large focus on adults being role models to children as they imitate and repeat caregivers and adult reinforcement (Aubry and Riley, 2016).

Kucirkova (2018) emphasises e-books like the reader read can be enriched with interactive features, for example swiping the page, and could support fine motor skills or spatial recognition, as well as fostering children's curiosity and could support reading. Moreover, researchers found children using e-books with moving images children learnt words better, compared to the same book with static images (Verhallen and Bus, 2010, cited in Kurikova, 2018).

Book Trust (2024) research highlights the decline in children reading for enjoyment as they progress through school and emphasises the importance of the adult nurturing the love for books, by providing access to stories and providing inspiration. Moreover, the National Literacy Trust (2023) highlight the benefits of reading for pleasure, however their findings showed in 2023 regarding children who receive free school meals, aged between 5 and 8, that 1 in 5 did not have a book of their own at home.

Conclusion

A good storyteller brings many benefits to children's language and literacy development as well as introducing digital literacy, following the CfW (Welsh Government, 2021b). By providing children with curiosity and embedding their interest with language, helps develop children's language to being good communicators through words, body language and with emotion and expression.

The storyteller chose appropriate books that have natural rhythm, rhyme and repetition that children that enjoy reading to children helps children to understand the structure and rules of language and develops their vocabulary. Moreover, Vygotsky (1920) emphasises the importance of adults providing stimulating stories, rhymes and songs, enabling children to practice through play their new language (Gray and MacBlain, 2015). Additionally, Skinner (1957) states children repeat what they hear and through positive reinforcements will develop language. Supporting Skinner, Piaget (1950) states children learn through repetition and through play, schemas (Aubrey and Riley, 2016).

Reflection

Writing on this topic, I chose not to use AI. I did find finding different theorists difficult, as mostly Chomsky appeared, his theory with the LAD is pioneering. Sources were mostly found via Moodle and books suggested along with physical academic books at home.

I felt the articles, books and other information, the authors were very passionate in language and literacy themselves and have a strong interest with language, but they were either for or against each other. I found when looking at research, it was either outdated, or very recent, but it seems not much has changed. I particularly enjoyed reading Usha Goswami's work in especially on rhythm, rhymes and music and how important nursery rhymes, singing, and stories really are especially at a young age.

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AI

I confirm that I have not used any AI 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.