

Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

.The Welsh Government (2020) states Children should be encouraged and supported to foster a love of books and stories. Early years practitioners have a crucial role in enhancing childrens literacy, language and communication skills. Children should experience rich language opportunities to develop their listening, speaking and communication skills. Making time for ,supporting childrens attention, listening and understanding (Welsh Government, 2020).

When children listen to stories, they are exposed to new words, sentence structures, and concepts which enrich vocabulary and comprehension skills. Storytelling enhances cognitive development in young children which is essential for academic success (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Furthermore, Gibb (2016) explains that when children hear stories being read they become familiar with words they may not hear regularly or at all, this further developing their vocabulary. Chomsky's universal grammar theory states that Knowledge and understanding of language is acquired naturally by children, that the ability to understand and use language is innate and is intrinsic. Chomsky believes children are born with a language acquisition device and every child acquiring language moves through the same stages in the same order. Usually, learning language quickly and effortlessly (Hoque 2021).

Christensen (2019) explains an alternative to Chomsky's theory. Halpern (2016) argues that the brain has minimal structure at birth and a child's language is not acquired but informed from the language heard, Suggesting that language acquires the child more so than the child acquiring the language. Furthermore Piaget's theory of cognitive development states that the foundations of language development are laid during the sensorimotor stage from birth to the age of two. Children learn language from whom they interact with and acquire knowledge. Additionally, Piaget described developing object permanence, believing that when a child understands that objects continue to exist even when out of sight enables children to attach names and words to objects (Piaget 1976).

The storyteller incorporates familiar, relatable props into the storytelling, the chosen items enhance childrens ability to build connections between the story, language and the real world. According to Wright (2009) incorporating props not only makes the story more engaging and interactive it enhances the childrens vocabulary and language development. Moreover, Cekaitea and Björk-Willénb (2018) believe that the use of props in storytelling improves children's listening comprehension and creates an entertaining environment for learning literacy. The tactile toy bears, real porridge and recognisable items of different sizes introduce children to new words and encourage them to engage their senses, enhancing their learning.

According to Wright (2009) Stories are motivating, memorable and offer rich language experiences for children. Stories are an excellent way to learn language. A child's understanding of a story is based on the words, some words may be unfamiliar to the child. It is essential that children experience some unknown language to develop effective language and literacy skills. Understanding can be enhanced by the storyteller with the use of pictures and mime to make the story more visually enticing.

Similarly Neaum (2012) states that the voice is a powerful tool in storytelling. The change in pitch, tone and volume helps children to understand the plot events, enhance moral and emotional values and describe the characters. Characters can be identified by using different accents, tones or styles for them. Facial expressions, gestures, mimes and eye contact with the children help to tell the story in an engaging and entertaining way.

Furthermore, Elkind (2007) believes that the use of props in storytelling facilitates children's emotional development, helping children to recognise, understand and express emotions and feelings. In this instance the storyteller uses toys to represent the characters of Goldilocks and the three bears. The characters demonstrate a number of emotions, to include anger, confusion and sadness that the children can relate to helping to develop their emotional understanding. Furthermore Whitehead (2009) explains that stories are a way for children to communicate their feelings and make sense of their world.

Ferrari (2012) believes that digital competence is a human right. A skill set needed to be able to function in today's society. A variety of technical equipment can make learning language and literacy skills more fun and meaningful. Furthermore Nair and Yunus (2021) states that research shows that digital storytelling can benefit children by helping them communicate and speak more effectively. Additionally, digital storytelling plays a vital role in enhancing children's literacy skills, improving communication skills and encouraging expression.

Similarly the Welsh government (2012) states that Digital competence is essential for children if they are to be informed, capable and have the potential to be successful in today's increasingly digital world. It is essential that children have the opportunity to explore and develop their digital knowledge and skills with digital devices and media being used to enhance their play and experiences. Within the storytelling activity the storyteller used a computer screen to display moving images in relation to the story adding an entertaining digital dimension to the the story x

The Digital and numeracy framework (Welsh Government 2018) aims to provide all children with high level digital skills and digital competency, encouraging critical thinkers and creative, enterprising individuals. These children should feel confident to contribute positively and prosper in the increasingly digital world around them, being aware of both the and negative aspects of the digital world

Mertala and Salomaa, (2020) believe that by combining digital and non-digital experiences which enable participatory pedagogies for children to create their own learning through participation, is the best method for children's learning and development in the early years. The storyteller in the video has created an environment where the children feel comfortable, involved and respected enough to want to participate. A variety of methods are used to tell the story, space and time is given to encourage children's participation.

According to Bratitsis and Ziannas (2015) Storytelling can prepare and support children's experiences in their lives now or possibly in the future by offering opportunities for children to experience and become familiar with aspects of life, situations and social difficulties. Emotions, feelings, sympathy and empathy can be explored and promoted through the telling of stories. Digital storytelling supports learning and allows teachers to adopt innovative and improved teaching methods. Storytelling is a proven and popular pedagogy,

while digital storytelling is relatively recent and still seldom used in the setting of early childhood education.

The storyteller included a song to recap the story in a different medium. Murphey (1992) believes that song can help young children to improve their speaking and listening skills and encourage a better understanding of vocabulary. The repetitive nature of song offers greater exposure to words and can lead to improvement. The importance of enjoying stories and song for enjoyment sake is an important aspect in learning and development and is often overlooked by adults (Yorke 2011). Likewise, Hsiung-Blodgett (2020) believes that learning through the use of books is beneficial to children's language development, because story time is intended to be fun and playful; it holds the attention and concentration of young children for longer periods of time. In addition, Bettelheim and Lubetsky (1989). Supports this stating that a story must entertain the children in order for them to engage with it. The storyteller should stimulate the children's imagination and ignite curiosity.

The storyteller in the activity can be seen using animated voices, intonation, facial expressions and gestures. Pauses in the storytelling encourage the children's participation, holding their attention and encouraging their engagement. Key words or aspects of the story are emphasised as the storyteller spoke in a faster or slower pace for dramatisation. The storyteller also emphasises key words or concepts in the story with a change of tone or spoken volume.

The activity shows the effectiveness of repetition in storytelling, According to The Montessori Academy (2017) and Smidt (2013) children learn through memorisation and repetition, the more times a child experiences something, the stronger the neural pathway in the brain becomes which allows the child to remember more effectively. In addition Horst (2013) supports this notion explaining that each time a child hears a word they are able to think about it further and in different ways, developing understanding of their meaning and when to use them, thus increasing their vocabulary.

Grudgeon and Garder (2013) explains that the use of props is an effective way to help the children remember the story. Each prop can be used as a memory aid that assists the children to relate to the story. According to Barton (2013), it is believed that giving children props to explore may allow the children to communicate their thoughts and discuss the props therefore exploring their use of literacy and language. It is expanded that using props throughout storytelling connects literacy and language learning with play, which in turn has a positive impact on the engagement of the children.

In a study carried out by Barton (2013) evidence showed that the group of children that used props during the story remembered and understood the story better than the group that did not use props which is a clear indicator that props are beneficial to language development.

Massey (2013) believes that story telling activities in the classroom that include props promotes oracy development and audience participation. Grayzel (2019) states that giving the children something to do during the storytelling activity gives them the opportunity to take part in language learning that is experiential and memorable.

Involvement can be increased by incorporating the use of props. Laevers (2015) believes that one of two important factors that contribute to the quality of care given in settings is the

children's involvement. He believes that the involvement of children impacts their ability to learn confidently. He explains that when children are focused, motivated and mentally active the practitioner, or in this case the storyteller is fulfilling their role. When the opportunity arises to present the story to an audience they would need to stay focused and alert in order to put their item in the trolley when it was their turn. This would in turn give them motivation to listen to and comprehend the language as it was being spoken.

Repetition has an effect on children's language and literacy development as it gives the child a deeper meaning and understanding behind the language used. Neural pathways are created and strengthened in the brain each time a child hears, sees, does or says something therefore the more times something is repeated the higher the chance the child will remember it and add to their vocabulary. This can also have a positive impact on children's emergent writing, as children exposed to print will slowly improve their phonological awareness. Using props during story time is a way to connect language and literacy development with play, which in turn has an effect on the concentration levels of the children as well as improving their memory of the words used in the story. Using props as suggested, will encourage children to get involved as well as increase the need to listen and understand the story.

According to Berkowitz (2011) digital media can help children to develop speaking and listening skills. furthermore, Takeuchi and Stevens (2011) state that digital tools, such as educational apps and interactive games, can engage young children and enhance their motivation to learn. moreover, Digital media such as tablets can be useful tools for promoting literacy if scaffolded by adults, who can provide children with instructions on using the device, and verbal support to discuss stories (Neumann and Neumann, 2015)

Digital media allows for various forms of communication, promoting multimodal learning where children can engage through text, images, and audio (Neumann, 2016) Additionally, According to Donaldson (2015), digital literacy is supported in the new curriculum for Wales, it is described as experiential and advisers that practitioners should provide children with exciting opportunities that engage their interest to develop their literacy skills. while also promoting their digital skills (Welsh Government, 2008).

Wohlwend (2014) states that curricula should be relevant to the literacy practices that young children use in everyday life. Digital literacy skills are becoming increasingly important and starting to develop these skills in early childhood can have long-lasting benefits early childhood media literacy is a vital area of education that needs more attention. It equips children with essential skills for the digital age, promotes safety. Early childhood media literacy is a fundamental aspect of education that should be given more attention and resources. It equips children with skills necessary for the digital age, promotes safety and responsible media use, fosters critical thinking, and shapes them into responsible digital citizens. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, investing in early childhood media literacy is an investment in the future well-being of our children. however, Kucirkova (2014) believes over-reliance on digital devices could limit essential face-to-face social interactions, which are fundamental for social and emotional development. Additionally, Kingstown and

Third suggest that Young children may not fully understand online privacy and safety issues, potentially exposing them to risks (Livingstone & Third, 2017).

In conclusion it is clear that Storytelling is a valuable educational tool in the early years that can significantly impact a child's development. The many advantages and benefits of storytelling make it fundamental in early years settings. How a story is told has a powerful impact on children's learning, understanding and knowledge. Enjoyment is key, participation, props, enthusiastic reenactment and tone of voice can all enhance children's learning. It should be considered that hearing stories has a positive effect on children's literacy development, and shared stories should be introduced at an early age to promote initial language acquisition with adult modelling as children develop their literacy skills. Adults should endeavour to deliver stories in fun, exciting ways for children so they can benefit from the many advantages an enjoyment of shared stories can bring to their development. In this digital era, it can be acknowledged that children's developing digital competency can be used to enhance their literacy skills from an early age if scaffolded effectively by an adult.

In conclusion it is clear that Storytelling is a valuable educational tool in the early years that can significantly impact a child's development. The many advantages and benefits of storytelling make it fundamental in early years settings. How a story is told has a powerful impact on children's learning, understanding, knowledge., Enjoyment is key, child participation, props, enthusiastic reenactment and tone of voice can all enhance children's learning.

there are many positive aspects of digital literacy while mitigating and minimising the negative ones.

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