

According to Eastman and Hargrove (2021) and Rainville and Gordh (2016) storytelling provide opportunities for children to develop literacy skills, provide opportunities and develop an affection and fondles for reading stories. Furthermore, Rainville and Gordh (2016) and Brock and Rankin (2008) suggest storytelling promotes community within a classroom, children learn to understand the world and make connections with what they already know, therefore becoming a precious tool for practitioners to learn children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds as each child is unique and have different experiences. Complementary to this, Holmes (2019) stated that research discovered storytelling to young children can support a positive relationship with language abilities and creativity. Stories are a way of learning about life, culture, emotion, values and morals, supporting knowledge, empathy and thinking skills (Brock, A and Rankin, C 2008). While this is the case, Donaldson (2015) states children already live in a world of technology and modern society dictates digital competence, therefore it is fundamental to learning and life itself. The Welsh Government (2022) specify digital competence leads children to ask questions, it offers opportunities for different methods of digital communication as it has an impact on everyday life.

In the same way, Vygotsky seen communication and speech as an individual development, naming language and stories as cultural tools and emphasising on the importance of stories being readily available in schools. Not to mention, storytelling can support children to achieve new learning, for example, problem solving, and he seen language as the most important cultural tool, a social activity intensified through interactions with others (Aubrey, K and Riley, A. 2019). Likewise, language and thought according to Vygotsky are as one, to raise mental activities, for children need to know their thoughts and how to express them (Caldwell, H and Bird, J. 2015).

Considering the first sounds a baby hear are from the womb, their ears rapidly develop and become sensitive to sound from eighteen weeks of pregnancy, although the sounds are muffled because of the amniotic fluid, however, it is believed that later in the pregnancy the baby can recognise the voice of the mother (Simmons, T 2018).

In addition, Brock and Rankin (2008) state language is crucial in young children's development to learn, communicate and build positive relationships. Children listening consistently to effective language will support them to ask for things they need or want, modelling language and meaningful conversations, therefore it is important for practitioners to be aware of the numerous opportunities that will become apparent throughout the day. Similarly, evaluation and reflection on practice is an essential part of the role.

Considering language development in the early years, the first three years of a child's life can be described as the most crucial time and develops through interaction, social interaction, play and imagination. Nevertheless, it is apparent that more children at the age of four have limited speech starting school, therefore is it essential that practitioners have good understanding and knowledge to deliver storytelling activities to support children's language (Rogers, R. 2016).

Brock and Rankin (2008) and Medlicott (2019) describe storytelling as magical and mesmerising, giving children the opportunities to develop imagination and fantasy, taking them into another world and giving them pleasure and enjoyment. They develop a sense of empathy and the world around them, but most importantly, extending their vocabulary and language patterns. Children can become who they want and do what they want, exploring a variety of emotions safely, the possibilities are boundless.

Rhyming plays an important factor in storytelling as children experience rhythm of language and learn different sounds in language, they also become familiar with prediction when the rhyme is repeated. For example, in Giles Andreae's book; 'The Lion Who Wanted to Love' (2000) there are numerous rhyming words that the practitioner can use to support the development of oracy and language. When reading a rhyming story, children learn intonation and during roleplay will animate different voices of characters within the rhyme. Children experience fun and show enthusiasm, developing understanding of feelings, emotions and creativity. Rhyming is essential for children to develop oracy, the repetition of rhyming supports the children's memory of vocabulary, these factors contribute to develop and support children's writing skills as they will identify different words that sound similar and extend their spelling skills (The Measured Mum, 2016). Likewise, Brock and Rankin (2008) suggest children want to hear their favourite stories repeatedly, paying attention to the familiar part of the story they like most, learning the structure and vocabulary of language and how it is used and developed. Children will get physically involved, pointing to the characters or animals they like, developing the ability to become the reader, writer and storyteller. It is important for practitioners to introduce new vocabulary regularly for the development of language for children. For practitioners, it is important to understand that for some children they will not have stories read to them at home, consequently it is a unique way of learning for children as they will be more engaged and respond to the storyteller (Medlicott 2019).

Kuppen (2018) states learning different sounds can result in helping children to read and speak. Furthermore, studies suggest that rhyming and stories are essential for language development, from newborn, as babies have a sensitivity to rhyme. For that reason, children will prefer to choose a rhyming book over a story as it is more memorable for them. Children enjoy rhyme and repetition, it supports prediction skills, gives opportunities for closeness and fun and gives children a freedom to engage with language. It is apparent that nursery rhymes support phonemic awareness, contributing to recognition of sounds in words and identifying syllables within words. Oral language always comes first, before written language, therefore children learning to listen and speak is paramount for literacy development, according to Almon (2019).

According to Middleton (2022) there are many features that come with storytelling and using puppets is described as magical. Puppets support children's imagination, logical thinking and creative development as they will focus when a puppet appears and believe the puppet is real and will come to life. Furthermore, this is paramount to support and benefit children's creativity. It is important for practitioners to use puppets as if they are real, bringing them to life, modelling creativity and imagination. Additionally, Holmes (2019) explains Vygotsky seen creativity as a process for developing current ideas and behaviours, reflecting on old memories to make new

ones, using imagination. Aubrey and Riley (2020) explain Vygotsky said children think out loud and change to thought without talking to anyone and described this as enhanced by language development. He called this the in between stage, stating conversations would follow when more thinking developed. He describes speaking as a learning tool for expressions and thoughts.

Caldwell, (2015) explains in the digital world that is now, children need to be aware and familiarise themselves with the vast range of technologies and software that is available today. In the same way, eBooks add value, a range of content and provide motivating and interactive experiences because of the different modes of communication that are available and used in digital storytelling. Additionally, eBooks are available personalised and differentiated, relevant to individual children's learning. Another important point to recognise is apps, they can create and reinforce literacy and many other skills in an interactive and digital content and can include a never-ending range of photos, videos, activities that can also be differentiated to meet the individual needs of the child, particularly to focus on their interests. It can promote peer assessment and collaboration. In other words, eBooks can be changed but traditional fairy tales of books cannot.

Siraj-Blatchford and Whitebread (2003) state computer games have educational characteristics and include powerful story contexts to engage children and include inspiration for their imaginations to develop. Including a range of genres and covering familiar and domestic to magical and enchanted. Well loved stories have been created with the focus to develop creativity and imagination. The difference with digital stories gives the child the opportunity to use their imagination and change various parts of the story which offers cause and effect. For that reason, Caldwell and Bird (2015) identify iPads and laptops are now an important part of the classroom.

Beforehand, the relationship with software was a quick one, with rapid expansion over the years, however the focus was predominately on the home and not in an education setting, the main attraction being interactive stories and games and although this was seen as potential for education, there were diverse ways for progression and skills (Blatchford, J and Whitebread, D. 2003).

The Welsh Government (2020) recognise the fundamental importance of language, literacy and communication which is seen as a golden thread in the six areas of learning within the Welsh Curriculum. As a result, support is evident in this area for learning across the whole curriculum in a holistic approach and essential for human connection. These factors contribute to practitioners having good knowledge and understanding of children's development and giving children opportunities to allow them to explore language with the focus on speaking and listening, to enable children to communicate and make connections with people, places and communities. When children understand spoken language, it can support them to express themselves.

As explained by Brock and Rankin (2008) children learn language through interaction in their environment, they will imitate and practice what they hear, resulting in patterns of speech being evident. Furthermore, the understanding that each individual child is unique is equally important as they learn and develop differently, therefore

practitioners must meet the needs of each child. According to Nutbrown, C. (2006) Piaget's description of children's thought and language have contributed to the understanding of children's development over the years. Practical experiences, for example using the puppets, are important for the development of understanding and can be demonstrated in a linguistic form. Furthermore, Aubrey and Riley (2019) state children are captivated by their own environment and the ability to interact with it, according to Piaget. He believed there were four stages of development, beginning with the first stage, sensorimotor. This will happen when the child can make sense of the world through sensory experiences.

Nutbrown, (2006) describes storytelling as essential for young children to experience in their early development. It can contribute and support their thinking skills, extend their knowledge and give them experience of a variety of emotions. It is important for practitioners to provide numerous windows of opportunities for children to communicate thoughts and ideas through storytelling and stimulate children to create their own version of the story through roleplay. Books need to nourish the mind and extend their vocabulary and emotional development. Children need to experience the most magical, enchanting, wizardly and entrancing of stories. It has been shown that the most intriguing books can spark passion in literature for young children supporting the development of language and listening skills.

Bowkett, (No date) states stories have so much potential and provide support for children to develop listening and communication skills and concentration skills. The importance of how a story is told will provide opportunities for children to react and interact with the story. This is critical for practitioners to understand because children will bring the experiences of the story to life. The practitioner reading the story, *The Lion Who Wanted to Love*, used facial expression, hand gestures, eye contact, intonation in her voice and puppets, giving each child a unique, extraordinary experience.

To conclude, storytelling with young children is essential to their development, in particular oracy, language and communication. It also promotes their brain development, imagination, emotional development and it can be shown to support relationships with their peers. It helps young children to understand the world around them and give insight into different situations. Additionally, practitioners have the chance to choose a different topic, sometimes to focus on one that will focus on a certain situation (Gallagher, A 2022).

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