

Language and literacy in the digital age.

Over many thousands of years stories have allowed humans to make connections and communicate. Stories have enabled people to make sense of their surroundings and help with discovering a sense of belonging (Bitesize, 2023). According to Isik (2016, P, 115) and Bitesize (2023) storytelling and listening to stories is an essential development in early years. Stories aid native and second language acquisitions. Scientific evidence has shown that when a baby is read to in the womb it is extremely beneficial to development, even in these early stages. This is because it allows the baby to begin to bond and recognise the voices around them. According to Bitesize (2023) research shows that early language development may begin to form before birth. Hellman (2017) backs this up stating that through foetal heart rate research, results concluded that the reaction a baby has to language, voices and rhythm may indicate that foetuses are tuning into their acquired language while in the womb.

To enable humans to speak a language, children need to develop in 5 linguistic areas. These areas include phonology, lexis, semantics, grammar, and pragmatics (The University of Sheffield, 2023). According to The university of Sheffield (2023) phonology includes a development called melodic utterance, which is when babies begin to use rhythm and melodies to sound out more sounds. This rhythmic pattern is something practitioners can use to support language development in setting, an example is seen in both the digital video and classic storytelling video.

According to Hsiung- Blodgett (2020) story telling has a significant impact of language acquisition and the development of language. For example, when children are read a story, it involves listening which ultimately leads to learning. As seen in the digital story video, some stories include repetition and rhyme, this style of storytelling allows opportunities for practitioners to implement pauses for children to fill the gaps of a story, through this technique children are able to gain skills such as, memory, engaging, confidence and opportunities to become interactive during these times (Hsiung-Blodgett, 2023, Kuppen, 2018 and Dujmovic, 2021). Dujmovic (2021) expands further and states that in order to get the interactions an adult desires from children, the storyteller must be well practised, a good performer and have chosen adequate stories that harvest emotional intelligence and allow children to experience an insight of human demeanour. Kuppen (2018) expands further stating that studies have shown babies and children have a sensitivity towards rhythm and rhyme. Language on a day-to-day basis can sound like meaningless noise to a baby, however, children from as young as nine months are able to use cue sounds that alert them into language, thus the importance of hearing repetition like in the videos, through stories to support early language development. The way in which language is expressed is known as prosody. American psychology association (2014) suggests that the rhythm, intonation, and stress of speech provides children with meaning to the words spoken. An example of prosody is seen in both storytelling videos, although two very different storytelling experiences, the desired language development outcome is the same. Critics argue that rhyme and rhythm offer a

musicality to speech, however prosodic language like used in the videos differs in pitch and relate to vocal range. Whereas music and song are reliant on exact pitch and melodies (American psychological association, 2014, Heidelberg, 1978 and Crystal, 2009). The use of prosody in storytelling allows the book to come alive. When children are subjected to poor speech prosody there is a chance it may hinder their representation of how text may sound, having a negative impact on how they pick up reading skills. However, Noam Chomsky critiques the need for modelling language or the structure in which it is formed, as he believes children are born with innate abilities to learn language (Horgan, 2016 and Groen, Veenendaal and Verhoeven, 2018). Another critique to rhyming stories is that children who are diagnosed with dyslexia often struggle to appreciate or understand the links to rhyming. Children who have dyslexia struggle with phonological awareness (Williams, 2022 and NHS, ND).

In contrast to Chomsky, Jean Aitchison believes children learn through language naturally only when they are properly nurtured, furthermore the instincts of a human are those that lead people to pay attention to their surroundings when it is pointed out to them. For example, in the digital video a lot of hand gestures were used, whereas in the traditional story hand gestures were limited, however there were opportunities to point to the pictures in the book and ask questions (Aitchison, 2001, p.134). According to Master class (2021) and Meltzer (2020) over the years the delivery and techniques adults use in physical story telling has changed. However, the ability to connect words and discover a deeper meaning through actions and pointing have remained consistent. Pointing to words can benefit children as practitioners are demonstrating how to read from left to right, furthermore, when reading a book, it should be read from the top of the page to the bottom, this process improves a child's ability to write and form words and also the skills needed for language comprehension. In contrast to this Arentz (2015) believes that when children are taught to finger point at words, it can slow down their ability to read with a flow and can make children sound robotic when attempting to read. In the traditional story telling video the blurb was read to the children. According to Tanya (2023) the blurb provides children with a small description of what to expect in the story. Reading the blurb has benefits such as, an idea of what to expect, feelings of anticipation and the beginning of character recognition. Hearing the blurb rather than starting the story straight away keeps children focused, it can build up questions in a child's mind and make them eager to know the answers, which they will find inside the storybook (Tanya, 2023 and Demir, 2022).

As seen in the digital story, not having a hardcopy book allows the storyteller to be hands free. Although children do not experience the same learning outcomes as in the traditional story video, such as turning pages and the physicality of a book, it instead provides opportunities for practitioners to point, gesture and interact more with children whilst reading. Research has proven the importance of hand gesturing when supporting word acquisition. Jean Aitchison backs this up with her theory based on the three stages of linguistic development, Labelling, packaging and, network building (curious world, 2017, master class, 2021 and SSSFC English, 2013). According to Explore psychology (2023) Piaget's theory also backs up Jean

Aitchison and links to the digital video as he believed that children between the ages of two and seven go through a preoperational stage of development. Explore psychology (2023) explores further into Piaget's theory suggesting that children have the ability to link objects, ideas, and people, however, at this age children struggle with logic and making sense of this concept in their minds. Children are unable to take the perspective of others, and this is where stories can aid that area of development, offering different viewpoints and oracy from more than one perspective (Lumen learning, ND and Explore psychology, 2023).

According to Taylor (2019) technology and reading apps in the digital age could be detrimental to children's reading development. Research shows that children have increased vocabulary through digital stories, however dialogic reading skills had deteriorated in comparison to the skills developed when using a hard copy book. In contrast to this David crystal does not see technology as detrimental to language, instead he believes it has the opposite effect and sees the potential of enriching other languages through technology (Ranger 2007 and Taylor, 2019). According to Stasic (2015) technology is still not applied accordingly in education, this can be due to reasons such as, lack of funding and resources or even a lack of knowledge and training from staff.

When practitioners' read stories to children, if the way in which it is read is expressionless, it becomes difficult for children to remain interested. Practitioners should support children by reading with expression. This can include changing your voice to reflect emotion, an example of this can be seen in the traditional story telling video. This allows children to not only listen and engage but it is also paramount for understanding comprehension. In the traditional video expressive reading is modelling through a variety of voices, pitch, and tones. Using different voices provides children with opportunities to distinguish different characters. When children are offered this support, they are given the foundation to recognise concepts and perhaps go on to mimic a storyteller's expressions when reading for themselves (Begin learning team. 2022 and Super simple 2023). According to Super simple (2023) there are many ways in which a voice can support learning, it can highlight emotions, such as, feeling angry, sad, or happy. Children are then able to link these emotions with the words spoken and what images they can see on the page, thus supporting language and literacy. BJ Novak wrote a book called 'The book with no pictures' this book contains only words. The lesson learnt from this story is that a book without pictures can still be enjoyable, fun, and engaging when it is told in the correct manner, for example, with emotions, expressions, and funny voices like in the traditional story (Preschooligans, 2019).

It is without a doubt that literacy and language is crucial part of development. There are benefits that include building relationships, and setting the foundations for the skills that children need to learn to read and write. When a literacy journey begins at birth it sets children on the right path to developing oral skills. It is a practitioner's role to apply their knowledge and individual experiences with children, to encourage children to become curious and motivated learners. However, although practitioners should be aware of all new literacy and language theories, which still change regularly, they should also be their own researchers in setting. Applying skills that

may suit a child's personal language and literacy developmental needs (Whitehead, 2010, Bower, 2014, and Hope, 2019). National literacy trust (2020) states that reading to a child has outstanding benefits, it allows children to feel valued and like they really matter. Reading with a child can reduce anxiety, improved wellbeing and provides a sense of security. However, despite these benefits less than fifty percent of parents read everyday with their children.

When children are exposed to words through oracy or reading, their language cognitive capacity expands (National literacy trust, 2020 and Sheldon- Dean, 2023). When children lack exposure to language it can have a detrimental impact on their language development and the structure of their brain, altering the structure of areas relevant to language in the brain (National institute on deafness and communication disorders, 2023). Another outcome to lack of language exposure is developmental language disorder, this is a disorder that can impact a child's ability to learn, understand and their overall use of language (NIDCD, 2023 and Kunkalikar, 2023).

According to the National literacy trust (2019) language and literacy are closely linked and both play vital roles in building the foundations to life. Language and literacy play a huge part in children's lifestyles, their health and even employability. Practitioners should support this by offering the best opportunities to promote language and communication skills which will then provide children with the stepping stones to be able to read with fluency (National literacy trust, 2019).

Overall, it is clear that not only reading to children, but the way in which we tell a story can impact a child's interest in language and literacy. Reading should be something that is experienced. Keeping children engaged is the overall aim, so they can experience the fun and enjoyment of a story. Digital reading and traditional reading each have their own benefits, however each method is a form of storytelling that will support language developments. Practitioners should continue to provide the vital support to encourage language and literacy in settings (National literacy trust, 2019 and Preschooligans, 2019).

Language and literacy reference list.

- Aitchison, J. (2001) *The birth of rules*. Available at: [26PiNaLFNd6L_194.pdf](#) (Accessed: 20 October 2023).
- American psychological association (2014) *Prosody in speech and song*. Available at: [Prosody in Speech and Song \(apa.org\)](#) (Accessed: October 20, 2023).
- Arentz (2015) *When to say 'so long' to finger pointing*. Available at: [When to Say "So Long!" to Finger Pointing | Adventures in Literacy Land](#) (Accessed: 20 October 2023).
- BBC (2023). *The science of singing to bump*. Available at: [Singing to baby: When can babies hear in the womb? - BBC Tiny Happy People](#) (Accessed: October 18, 2023).
- Begin learning team. (2022) *Reading with expressions: A helpful guide for parents*. Available at: [Reading With Expression: A Helpful Guide For Parents - Begin Learning](#) (Accessed: 20 October 2023).
- Bitesize (2023). *Why is storytelling good for children's learning?* Available at: [Why is storytelling such a powerful learning tool? - BBC Bitesize](#) (Accessed: October 18, 2023).
- Bower, V. (Ed). (2014) *Developing early literacy 0-8*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Crystal, D. (2009) *David Crystal*. Available at: [David Crystal - YouTube](#) (Accessed: 20 October 2023).
- Crystal, D. 1986: *Prosodic development*. In Fletcher, P. and Garman, M., editors, *Language acquisition*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Demir, S. (2022) *Promoting literacy products: Book blurbs as a genre*. Available at: [293 Article Text 524 1 10 20221217-libre.pdf \(d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net\)](#) (Accessed: 22 October 2023).
- Dujmovik, M (2021). *Storytelling as a method of EFL teaching*. Available at: [STORYTELLING AS A METHOD OF EFL TEACHING \(srce.hr\)](#) (Accessed: October 19, 2023).
- Explore psychology. (2023) *Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development*. Available at: [Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development – Explore Psychology](#) (Accessed: 22 October 2023).
- Groen, M, Veenendaal, N and Verhoeven. (2018) *The role of prosody in reading comprehension: evidence from poor comprehenders*. Wiley. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12133>
- Heidelberg, J. (1978) *David crystal- The English tone of voice*. International review of applied linguistics in language teaching: Sweden.

- Hellman, R (2017). *Study shows language development starts in the womb*. Available at: [Study shows language development starts in the womb | The University of Kansas \(ku.edu\)](#) (Accessed: October 18 2023).
- Hope. (2019) *Importance of language development and literacy in children*. Available at: [Importance of Language Development and Literacy in Children - Hope AMC \(hope-amc.com\)](#) (Accessed: 24 October 2023).
- Horgan, J. (2026) *Is Chomsky's theory of language wrong? Pinker weighs in on debate*. Available at: [Is Chomsky's Theory of Language Wrong? Pinker Weighs in on Debate - Scientific American Blog Network](#) (Accessed: 20 October 2023).
- Hsiung-Blodgett (2020). *The power of story telling for children in second language acquisition*. Available at: [The Power of Storytelling for Children in Language Development \(multiculturalkidblogs.com\)](#). (Accessed: October 19, 2023).
- Isik, M. A. (2016). The Impact of Storytelling on Young Ages. *European Journal of Language and Literature*. Pp.115–118. <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejls.v6i1.p115-118>
- Jones, B. (2023) *Using facial expressions to tell stories*. Available at: [Use Facial Expressions To Tell Stories - eLearningArt](#) (Accessed: 22 October 2023).
- Kunkalika, B. (2023) *Limited exposure to language during childhood alters adult brain structure*. Available at: [Limited exposure to language during childhood alters adult brain structure \(news-medical.net\)](#) (Accessed: 25 October 2023).
- Kuppen, S (2018). *Rhymes in early childhood*. Available at: [Rhymes in early childhood | BookTrust](#) (Accessed: October 19, 2023).
- Lumen learning (ND) *Piaget's preoccupation stage of cognitive development*. Available at: [Piaget's Preoperational Stage of Cognitive Development | Lifespan Development \(lumenlearning.com\)](#) (Accessed: 22 October 2023).
- Mahdavi, Z. (2022). Storytelling in Pregnancy and Childbirth: An Integrative Review of the Literature. *Journal of pregnancy*. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/8483777>
- Master class. (2021) *How to tell a story effectively: 7 storytelling tips*. Available at: [How to Tell a Story Effectively: 7 Storytelling Tips - 2023 - MasterClass](#) (Accessed: 20 October, 2023).
- Meltzer, E. (2020) *Breaking the code: Phonics and reading*. Available at: [Put a Finger on It! How Finger-Tracking Can Help Improve Children's Reading - Breaking The Code](#) (Accessed: 20 October, 2023).
- National institute on deafness and communication disorders. (2023) *Developmental language disorder*. Available at: [Developmental Language Disorder | NIDCD \(nih.gov\)](#) (Accessed: 25 October 2023).
- National literacy trust. (2019) *Language unlocks reading: supporting early language and reading for every child*. Available at: [Language unlocks reading.pdf \(literacytrust.org.uk\)](#) (Accessed: 25 October 2023).

National literacy trust. (2020) *Reading to children is so powerful, so simple and yet so misunderstood*. Available at: [Reading to children is so powerful, so simple and yet so misunderstood | National Literacy Trust](#) (Accessed: 24 October 2023).

National Health Service [NHS] (ND) *Dyslexia*. Available at: [Dyslexia - Symptoms - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) (Accessed: 24 October 2023).

Peck, J. (1989) *Using storytelling to promote language and literacy development*. The Reading Teacher, vol. 43, no. 2, 1989, pp. 138–41. Available at: [Using Storytelling to Promote Language and Literacy Development on JSTOR](#) (Accessed: 22 October 2023).

Preschooligans. (2019) *Book review and lesson plan: the book with no pictures*. Available at: [Book Review & Lesson Plan: The Book With No Pictures - Preschooligans.com](#) (Accessed: 24 October 2023).

Ranger, G (2007) David Crystal language and the internet. *Cambridge university press*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4000/lexis.1831>

Sheldon-Dean, H. (2023) *Why it is important to read to your child?* Available at: [Why Is It Important to Read to Your Child? - Child Mind Institute](#) (Accessed: 24 October 2023).

SSSFC English. (2013) *Some useful language acquisition theories*. Available at: [Jean Aitchison | SSSFC English \(wordpress.com\)](#) (Accessed: 20 October 2023).

Stewart, E. (2023) *Pointing at words as you read aloud could help your child*. Available at: [Pointing at words as you read aloud could help your child | MadeForMums](#) (Accessed: 20 October 2023).

Stosic, L. (2015) The importance of educational technology in teaching. *FSFEI HE Don State Technical University*. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.23947/2334-8496-2015-3-1-111-114>

Super simple. (2023) *5 simple tips for reading to children*. Available at: [5 Simple Tips for Reading to Children - Super Simple](#) (Accessed: 22 October 2023).

Tanya. (2023) *Using the book blurb to increase focused reading*. Available at: [Using the BOOK BLURB to Increase Focused Reading \(literacytreasures.com\)](#) (Accessed: 22 October 2023).

Taylor, L. (2019) *The advantages and disadvantages of digital books to children's emergent literacy*. Available at: [The advantages and disadvantages of digital books to children's emergent literacy. | University of Southampton Educational Psychology research blog \(soton.ac.uk\)](#) (Accessed: 20 October 2023).

Whitehead, M.R. (2010) *Language and literacy in the early years 0-7*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Williams, K. (2022) *Dyslexia and phonological processing*. Available at: [Dyslexia and Phonological Processing | Dyslexia UK](#) (Accessed: 24 October 2023).

