

Medlicott (2018) suggests that storytelling in the early years lays the foundation of language acquisition. She explains that the majority of stories contain words, and that each time a child hears a story, they are not only exposed to new vocabulary, but are presented with the words in context so they can understand what these words mean. National Literacy Trust (2017) are of the position that technology has influence in developing early language and literacy. Their research found that when technology is used effectively, it can particularly benefit the reading skills of boys and under privileged children.

Firstly, the choice of book in the storytelling activity is appropriate for children under 7 years old. Rogers (2008) explains that when storytelling, the book chosen is important. This is because research shows that when a child has a pleasant experience when reading, they are likely to have a wider vocabulary, be confident readers and achieve better academically. Satriani's (2019) findings would support Rogers (2008) as they found that the choice of story played a part in the outcome. For example, when children were enjoying the story, they were able to recall new words from the book, but this was not the case if children were not engaged by the book.

During the traditional storytelling of *The Gruffalo*, there are numerous times where the reader engages directly with the children during the story, via questions and encouraging them to perform actions relating to specific parts of the story. Brown (2014) suggests that using this level of interaction during storytelling will encourage children to develop their reading and literacy skills. Cekaite and Bjork-Willen (2018) would agree with this and add that when there are pauses in the story to encourage child participation, like the reader did during the traditional story, it enhances literacy socialization. Vaahtoranta *et al.* (2019) acknowledge that interaction during storytelling plays a role in developing children's language, but notes that the impact child interaction during storytelling has on vocabulary development lacks research. Contrastingly, during the digital storytelling, the reader has limited interaction with the children as they are not present in the room. Vygotsky (1967) may argue that a weakness of both the traditional and digital video was that the children did not have direct access to the text to follow along with the story, which would be shared reading. Fisher and Frey (2012) would agree with this and explain that when the children have access to the text and engage in shared reading, this will develop literacy as the

children can read and understand what the words they are hearing look like. Therefore, if this activity were to be carried out again, it would be beneficial to give the children copies of the book to follow along.

The reader in the traditional storytelling video was able to make direct eye contact with the children as they were present in the setting. Bowkett (2013) holds the opinion that eye contact plays a key role during storytelling as it allows the reader to watch the children's live reactions to the story as the children were present in front of the reader, but eye contact is something that was not possible during the digital video. Lenhart *et al.* (2020) conducted a study in which one group of children participated in audio storytelling and the other in a live storytelling. They found that children in the live, in-person storytelling group achieved more in terms of retaining vocabulary and understanding the story. Lenhart *et al.* (2020) believe that the children achieved higher in this group because of 'attention-guiding behaviour' like the eye contact between adult and children. They believe that the eye contact kept the children more engaged and as a result, their vocabulary and comprehensive ability improved. Cigerci and Gultekin (2017) advocate that listening skills are a key factor in language acquisition, but despite this, listening skills are overlooked in education. They carried out research to prove their theory and their study found that by using digital storytelling techniques, children improved their listening skills, which provided greater understanding of the stories. This questions Lenhart *et al.* (2020) eye contact theory by believing listening benefits outweigh sight benefits when it comes to developing literacy.

In both the traditional story video and the digital story video, the reader used intonation when telling the story of The Gruffalo. However, it can be said that during the traditional storytelling, the reader's intonation skills are more energetic and exciting, compared to the digital storytelling where the intonation could be classed as flat. Westlund *et al.* (2017) conducted a study in which 45 English speaking children with an average age of 5 years engaged in a storytelling task in which a robot read a story using expressive intonation techniques, the children were then tested afterwards to see what vocabulary they retained and if they could recall the story. A few weeks later, the same children engaged in a different story, but this time the robot was programmed to use flat intonation when reading. It was found that the children remembered more of the words and the story when told using expressive intonation, compared to when they heard a

story with flat intonation. Shannon (2017) may agree that the more expressive intonation used during the traditional story would benefit the children's language development, as when children are aware of intonation, they are more likely to retell the story or rewrite the story, which is an opportunity to practice writing and oral skills.

From analysing both the traditional and digital storytelling videos, it can be said that in the traditional storytelling video, the reader uses more exaggerated facial expression than in the digital storytelling video. Washington (2014) believes that facial expressions play a key role when storytelling. She explains that children learn vocabulary and how to respond to people by observing facial expressions. Mokhtar, Halim and Kamarulzaman (2010) would agree and offer the idea that good facial expressions will engage children in the story and most benefits are seen when a child is engaged. When children pay full attention to stories, there is improvement in their talking, reading and writing in everyday life. Kekatos (2017) does not disagree with Washington's (2014) findings, but does introduce a barrier to her theory. Kekatos (2017) expresses that not all children can develop their literacy skills by observing facial expressions. For example, research conducted on autistic children found that some children with autism are unable to decipher the different emotions and motivations exhibited in facial expressions. This means they may not comprehend and develop language from facial expression in the same way a non- autistic child would.

When both videos were evaluated further, it was found that there were visual aspects in the traditional and digital storytelling videos. For example, in the traditional storytelling video, the read used character masks to tell the story. Meers (2018) advocates that when telling children, a story, there should be creative aspects, in the case of the traditional story, the face masks. Meers (2018) says that when children are immersed in a story by creative props, they are more likely to retain a variety of language and widen their comprehension of characters and stories. The use of the masks will encourage children to retell the story again and practice oral and comprehension skills. Meers (2018) may suggest that a drawback of using the masks was that the children did not create them, as if they had, it would have increased their interest in the story and therefore their literacy development. Corbett (2011) agrees with Meers (2018) view that masks encourage the children to retell the story and this continuous practice of vocabulary will embed in their brains and improve their oral

communication. Corbett (2011) also has the opinion that the more memorable a story is by using creative props, it will enhance a child's writing and encourage them to write with imagination. Stadler and Ward (2010) carried out research in which 42 children were split into 2 groups. One group listened to a story for eight weeks with props, the other without props. Whilst they found that the children who had props improved their descriptive language, it was found that the group who did not use props had better comprehension of the story and retention of vocabulary. A possible reason given for this is because the children are so focused on the character props, in this case would be the masks, that they are unable to tie the whole story together and remember the words used. Bruner (1986) may disagree with Stadler and Ward (2010) as he believes children respond more to stories when there is an interaction between the words and physical props, like the masks in the story and that this response triggers literacy development in the brain.

The digital storytelling video also had a visual aspect, in the form of the animation that was playing. Rahiem's (2021) research found that teachers who utilise digital storytelling find that it keeps children engaged for longer, more interested in what they are listening to and generally find it a more enjoyable experience in comparison to traditional story telling. Additionally, Wright *et al.* (2003) carried out research on 2-7-year olds and found that digital stories improved literacy in low- medium income household children, but it was noted that results also depended on the content of the story. Donaldson (2015) may agree with the use of digital storytelling as in his review of the Welsh curriculum, he found there were shortcomings when it came to low income children having lower levels of literacy than their peers and that the new curriculum in Wales should be more inclusive. Wright *et al* (2003) and The National Literacy Trust (2017) would advocate that digital storytelling can provide inclusive education. Smeda, Dakich and Sharda (2014) would agree that digital storytelling is effective and state that digital storytelling is successful in creating a more interesting and stimulating way of learning. They report that digital storytelling has allowed children to make progress in areas they previously struggled, particularly writing. For example, it has improved their ability to spell, structure sentences and produce longer pieces of text.

The digital storytelling video would have taken place on a program like Microsoft Teams for the children to watch during Coronavirus isolation. This would have enabled the children to achieve progression steps outlined by the Welsh Government (2018a) in their Digital Competence Framework (DCF). For example, within the DCF, learners are expected to talk about different forms of online communication. From the digital storytelling on teams, the children could discuss that they communicated with their teacher via videocall, and even messaging, as they could have messaged their teacher responses on Teams. Additionally, listening to the story via video call provides the opportunity for the children to learn about appropriate online communication which is set out as Interacting and Collaborating Progression step 3. For example, when the reader was telling the story, it would not have been appropriate to ask a question over the microphone, so they child may have typed a message instead for the teacher to see when the story had finished. The Welsh Government (2018b) state in their four purposes for the new curriculum in Wales that children should be able to use digital technologies to communicate, something that the children were able to practice when listening to the digital story on teams.

To conclude, storytelling is a beneficial activity for children to develop their language and literacy skills. Washington (2014) may argue that there are more facial expressions in the traditional video and that this would lead to better vocabulary. In terms of the new curriculum in Wales, Donaldson (2015) found low income children to be less literate. The National Literacy Society (2017) are advocates of utilising digital storytelling to bridge this gap and create an inclusive education where everyone has equal learning opportunities.

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