

Language and Literacy in the digital age.

Storytelling within the early years is a comprehensive strategy that enables children to gain early literacy skills that include communicating, listening, speaking as well as reading and writing. Storytelling encourages purposeful talking whilst increasing children's interest in exploring and reading different text, introduces new vocabulary and inspires early writing as children begin to write their own stories through mark making. Storytelling offers an engaging and authentic approach by surrounding children with language to enhance vocabulary, and narrative skills within their learning environment (University of Texas Arlington, 2015; Patel, 2018; Nicolopoulou et al., 2015; Pacey, 2021). According to O'Byrne et.al. (2018) and National Literacy Trust (2017) emergent digital methods are altering the way in which story time is used and introducing new possibilities. Technology can support and present new learning opportunities for early literacy, language and communication through a variety of apps and ebooks when used as a learning tool similar to a book.

Reading to children from an early age is fundamental for children's literacy and overall good language development. The early years in a child's life is an important window as this is where a child's brain develops the quickest (Vardy, 2019; The Carol Pufahl Literacy Foundation, 2021; Maine Government, no date). Pacey (2021) and Miranda (2021) state how the term literacy is more than reading and writing claiming that literacy comprises of a wide range of learning such as how to communicate with one another, the ability to be able to contribute actively and meaningfully within society and books are a resource in facilitating such skills. Furthermore, Welsh Government (2021) state literature increases children's possibilities whilst allowing children to discover language and different forms of communication. Literacy experiences provided to children should be aimed to inspire their imagination and creativity whilst reading helps to build a lifelong love of literature. During both story videos the practitioner displayed many skills and behaviours to engage children such as reading aloud, voice intonation, props and questioning. Reading aloud is beneficial for children in many ways and took place during the traditional and digital story. According to Center of teaching (no date) and National Center for Youth Issues (no date) reading aloud to children enables them to understand what they see and hear while making sense of the world around them. Through reading aloud children's vocabulary is extended allowing them to learn the language of books as this differs from the language that is heard in daily conversations. A study by Massoro (no date) found that reading aloud to children introduces them to wide-ranging vocabulary that children would not normally be exposed to during adult-child conversations. The study suggests by reading aloud, children are two to three times more likely to hear words that are not among the 5,000 most common English words. Therefore, children develop word mastery and grammatical understanding that prepares them for competent literacy skills. Beauchat et.al. 2012, The Reading School, 2021 and Literacy in Focus, 2019 suggests that in addition to hearing new words, reading aloud enables children to develop their phonological awareness. By listening to the words read, children will hear the sounds that make an individual word supporting their understanding that language is made up of words. Phonological awareness allows children to recognise the link between language and words, words and sounds and how the sounds are related to letters and letter patterns. Smith (2019) and Bayly (no date) support the idea of children building early phonological

awareness suggesting phonological awareness is a foundational skill that steers their ability to become successful readers and learners in the future. Both stories provide repetition according to Reading Bright Start (2021), First Five Years (2019) and Dugger (2020) state repetition support the practice that enables children to learn and master new skills whilst strengthening the connections in a child's brain that assists learning. Throughout each video the practitioner made effective use of expression and voice intonation. According to Bowkett (no date) and Loveless (2021) this is beneficial as voice intonation and nonverbal cue such as body language and expression allows children to develop their understanding of the story. Understanding occurs not only from the words, but from how the words are read. Learning during mealtime (2014) and Mira and Schwanenflugel (2013) argue that young children who cannot read themselves depend on listening to a story being read therefore, as a result reading with expression and emotion can alter the way in which children understand a story while also helping them to recall information. Modelling language directly links to Bruner's scaffolding theory (1976) whereby practitioners' model and lead reading experiences to begin and over time children gain confidence to lead reading experiences independently. Bruner's scaffolding theory is modelled on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1928) where children are capable of reaching their potential by interacting with more knowledgeable peers or adults. Vygotsky argued that children's language development was influenced by their relationships and social interactions (Victoria Gov, 2020). Furthermore, The Children's Literacy Charity (2021), Kris (2018) and Literacy Trust (2017) believe reading aloud to children has a positive effect on young children's social development stating children are able to express their own thoughts and feeling as stories provide a model that enable children to understand different emotions. Through books children learn the vocabulary needed to communicate and express their own feelings. During both videos print was visible for the children to see Kim (2017); Gerde et.al (2016) and Neaum (2012) states children begin their interest in writing through constant exposure to print in their environment. Books provide children with meaningful print which supports their early mark making and emergent writing skills, while early knowledge of print is a predictor of later literacy achievement. According to Ripple (no date) Nutbrown and Hannon (2011) environmental print promotes conversations as children are naturally inquisitive and will ask question when they see print. In turn this allows children to recognise letters within the print that occur in other words. Print awareness is one of the pre-reading skills needed in order for children to develop their writing skills. Furthermore, reading with expression is connected to the facilitation of language development and is more engaging for children. In addition to expression effective use of props by the practitioner was evident in both stories. Early Years Careers (2017) suggest using props during story time can enhance children's language while presenting new opportunities to learn. While Clarke (no date) and Beanstalk (2017) states props are fun, engaging and enrich children's experiences of books. Props allow stories to become interactive helping children's understanding at the same time stimulating a child's imagination. Thus, supporting Tomasello's theory (2003) that expression and pointing in a shared environment such as reading, contribute to children's language acquisition. He states pointing and expression are a prerequisite of language. In addition, Tomasello believes visuals such as expression and gestures are the build up to language (Krichevets, 2018). To further gain an awareness of children's understanding during both videos the practitioner asked questions. Scholastic (2020), Cbeebies grow up (2014), Victoria Gov (2020) and Elias (2014) state when children are asked questions, it enables them to think critically and

creatively. Questioning provides an opportunity for children to wonder, question and make sense of ideas within a book. When children are asked questions, they develop their social, emotional and cognitive skills. In addition, questioning allows children to think about other possible representations of stories, occasions and situations. Furthermore, according to Teacher Vision (no date) questioning is a process of investigation and when practitioners ask questions this will help model and encourage children to ask their own questions once they can read independently. Questioning provides an opportunity for 'talking environments' during which adults model quality talk. 'Talking environments' allows for conversations that are highly valued and encourage all aspects of language in turn, children grow in confidence. Questioning, talking, listening and modelling language all promote children's oracy (Johnson, 2018; Durand, 2016; Atwal 2019). While McCormack and Kloppe (2016) and Lodge (2020) state oracy allow children to understand turn taking, nonverbal cue such as voice, intonation and eye contact and how to listen and speak. Oracy also provides children numerous opportunities to converse in a purposeful, efficient and creative way that are stimulating, meaningful and engaging. Part of the Foundation Phase Framework (2015) is to support children's oracy by encouraging children to ask questions to clarify understanding and retell events within books. Illustrations can also offer an opportunity for children to engage in conversation (Walker, 2019). Both stories provided detailed illustrations and Middleton (2018), Maa Illustrations (2016) and Ellis (2014) believe that the primary reason for illustrations is to ensure the meaning of the story is translated to the reader or listener thus illustrations enable children to understand the meaning of the story even before they can read. Illustrations are the focal point that attracts children to a book as children respond to illustrations far easier than the words and often memorise the story using the pictures they see. Illustrations provide readers with an instant image of characters and setting while children will respond to characters from their visual appeal. However, there were some variations in the way the practitioner read the two stories. During the traditional story the practitioner was able to point at the words in the book while there was no pointing to text during the digital story. Raising Children (2021), Reading Rockets (2021) and Penguin (2021) claim pointing to words as they are read teaches children about print and words are made up of groups of letters. In addition, children understand that reading words starts on the left and moves to the right as well as from top to bottom on a page when reading in English. This is also one of the Foundation Phase (2015) Language, Literacy and communication strands that children should understand that print conveys meaning and is read from left to right and top to bottom. Although the digital story had many aspects of the traditional story such as pictures and text the practitioner failed to allow children to take part in the use of the technology. Neumann and Neumann (2015) suggest interactions with sociocultural devices such as touch screen tablets have the ability to promote emergent literacy when children tap, drag and swipe whilst developing children's technical and operational skills as children understand how the device works. Donaldson (2015) highlighted the importance of children's digital competence in order for them to be a part of our modern society as many occupations require high levels of digital skills. The Welsh Government (2020) describe digital competence as the 'set of skills, knowledge and attitudes that enable learners to use technologies and systems confidently, creatively and critically'. In addition, use of digital tools present opportunities for children to strengthen their language and literacy skills through language and text.

To conclude, stories in the form of books and digital stories are highly valuable and contribute greatly to children's early literacy development. Stories not only provide crucial development skills such as phonological awareness, letter patterns and word mastery but vocabulary is also extended far more than in daily conversations that will place them in good stead for future learning. Stories create a literacy rich environment where children contribute through oral discussion while reading and writing is also enhanced. Stories allow children to understand the world around them, make connections and give them tools to express emotions, inspires their imagination and stimulates creativity. Technology is apart of our modern society, and it is import for children to be competence with devices to increase their chances of successful futures.

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