

For young children, especially those between the ages of newborn and seven, storytelling is an effective way to promote development of language and literacy. Children are exposed to a variety of vocabulary, narrative patterns, and expressive language through storytelling, all of which help to establish the groundwork for early reading (Thompson, 2023). Children who interact with stories improve their vocabulary and language understanding, laying the foundation for future reading abilities (Read, 2021). Furthermore, Gryffin, 2024 suggests children may engage with the material through a variety of different senses when storytelling integrates several techniques for learning, such as music, visual aids, and vocal expression. This enhances retention and understanding. Incorporating videos and background music into stories also helps children develop digital literacy, preparing them for a modern learning environment as digital tools become more and more prevalent (Robin, 2016). I am going to explore the significance of three different storytelling behaviours, rhyme, music, and expressive voice, in promoting the development of early language in the parts that follow.

Rhyme

Rhyme is a fundamental component of early literacy as it introduces children to the rhythm and patterns of language. Children have a greater understanding of phonemes, the discrete sounds in language through hearing and recognizing rhymes, which is essential for phonemic awareness (Anna Ranson, 2016). Children can identify and predict sounds inside, which lays the groundwork for their future reading and spelling abilities. Children who interact with rhymes begin to grasp the structure and patterns of language, which helps them predict word formations and improves memory recall and vocabulary growth (Kids Learning Essentials, 2019). Phonemic awareness is emphasized as a crucial pre-reading skill in Jean Chall's Stages of Reading Development. Chall believes that because rhymes help children become verbally familiar with language patterns, they benefit from being exposed to rhyming structures (athome.readinghorizons.com, n.d.). This familiarity helps children develop phonological awareness, which is necessary for early reading decoding because it allows them to identify the sounds and syllables in words. This is further supported by research on emergent literacy, which shows that children who are exposed to rhymes have an easier time decoding written language since they are already sensitive to spoken language sound patterns (Victorian government, 2023).

Linking back to my part 1 I highlighted rhyming phrases in my storytelling "The Snail and the Whale" by repeating and highlighting rhyming pairings like "trail" and "snail" or "flock" and "dock." This deliberate focus made the experience fun and memorable by supporting children in becoming more aware of word sound structure. When I read this to my class they were actively using the phonemic patterns, many children started to predict the rhyme endings or repeat the rhyming phrases out loud. Early literacy requires phonological awareness, which is fostered by this kind of interaction. Additionally, allowing children play with rhymes helped them develop their sense of sounds, which is essential for early reading and spelling word recognition and construction. Children found it simpler to retain and retell the tale due to the rhythm and predictability of rhyming patterns, which also supported language understanding and storytelling recall.

Music

Children's engagement, memory, and sense of connection with the story can be improved by the use of music in storytelling (Kidd, 2019). Background music uses melody, rhythm, and tone to create an ambiance that may draw children in and help them concentrate on particular parts of the story (www.hooksounds.com, n.d.). Because the rhythmic patterns in music correspond with the phonemic patterns of language, music also helps children develop phonological awareness by helping them identify and anticipate language sounds. Furthermore, children may better understand the tone and mood of a story with the aid of music, which is a powerful enhancement that is essential for developing listening comprehension and story understanding (Vidal, Lousada and Vigário, 2020).

Research has shown that even before birth, a fetus can respond to external sounds, such as voices and music, which play an essential role in early sensory development (Chorna et al., 2019). By the third trimester, a baby's hearing is developed enough to recognize rhythmic patterns and tonal shifts in the sounds outside the womb. This early exposure to auditory stimuli helps infants begin to process and distinguish sounds, creating a foundation for later language recognition and emotional bonding (Colleen de Bellefonds, 2015). Studies indicate that babies can even remember familiar sounds, like a mother's voice or particular songs, which often soothe them after birth, suggesting that these prenatal experiences have a lasting impact on their memory and sense of familiarity. (Psychology Today, 2022)

Music, with patterns of rhythm and melody, also plays a significant role in stimulating neural pathways that support phonological awareness and memory (Eck, 2024). When parents speak or sing to their unborn baby, they introduce early forms of language patterns, making it easier for the child to recognize these patterns after birth. Music can also influence mood regulation, as rhythmic sounds have been found to relax both the mother and the fetus, helping to foster an environment where learning and bonding can begin before a baby enters the world (NHS inform, n.d.). Therefore, incorporating music and voice in storytelling later on builds upon these early foundations, reinforcing a child's ability to connect emotionally and cognitively with language and sound.

A special cognitive ability that can improve learning, especially in language acquisition, is musical intelligence, according to Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Since rhythm and melody aid in memory and understanding, Gardner's theory backs up the theory that including musical components into instruction might improve children's cognitive abilities (<https://www.facebook.com/thoughtcodotcom>, 2019). According to research on the integration of sensory input, children learn more effectively when aural signals and stories are combined because they are able to relate to the stories on an emotional and cognitive level. As an auditory aid, music enhances language learning by strengthening memory and phonetic patterns, all of which are critical for the development of language and literacy (Mason, Goldstein and Schwade, 2019).

I created a dramatic story experience during my storytelling part 1 by using instrumental background music that matched the moments in the story. For example, the music was dramatic and passionate during the dramatic scene where the whale is in danger as he swam too close to the shore. This helped to focus the children and increased their emotional response. Children became more engrossed and attentive when the music changed to a softer, tranquil tone at quieter parts, demonstrating the power of music to establish the tone and tempo of a story. Children were inspired to follow the story's emotional changes by these variations in musical dynamics, which strengthened their comprehension of the characters and narrative. Children became more involved by relating to the music's rhythm and tone, which improved their awareness of sounds and listening ability. Additionally, music improved children's recollection of the story's events and emotional cues, which are essential elements of narrative understanding, allowing them to recall specific scenes more vividly.

Expressive voice

Children listeners are drawn in and assisted in interpreting the emotions and dynamics of stories when an expressive voice which includes variations in tone, pitch, and volume is used to bring the stories to life (Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives, n.d.). According to Ben, 2012, As children can comprehend the tone, mood, and emotional details connected throughout the tale, expressive storytelling enhances the emotion and significance of words. In addition to keeping children interested, this method offers a more comprehensive language experience that promotes language retention and understanding. (Department For Education, 2023).

According to Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, which places a strong emphasis on social interaction and support in learning, children acquire sophisticated language via interacting with more experienced people (Morin, 2012). By providing vocal signals that enhance children's language comprehension, an expressive storyteller can serve as a guide in accordance with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Main, 2021). Storytellers make language more approachable and interesting by using a range of voice tones that help children in understanding the meaning and feelings contained inside the words. According to Vygotsky's theory, expressive storytelling helps children understand and remember language by giving them valuable social clues that they may absorb (Boris, 2017).

I used a range of voice expressions as I delivered The Snail and the Whale story in order to portray the story's many emotional tones. Children were better able to understand the tone of situations when the snail sounded surprised or lonely, for example, I spoke in a soft, calming tone at the start of the story when the snail was lonely and upset. On the other hand, I increased the speed and volume at the more dramatic elements, such as when the whale was in danger to allow the children to fully experience the story unfolding. Children were drawn in by these voice changes, which helped them more naturally understand characters feelings and track the story's emotional changes. As they linked the vocal signals to the story's setting, children were also able to strengthen their listening and interpretation abilities through the use of expressive voice. Children were better able to understand the story's deeper meanings, including character emotions and plot tension, due to expressive voice variation. These elements are essential for the development of empathy, storytelling memory, and general understanding.

Each storytelling behaviour, rhyme, music, and expressive voice each contributes uniquely to early language and literacy development. Rhyme improves phonological awareness, which helps children identify language patterns and serves as a basis for recognizing words in early reading (Wu, 2024). As an aural stimulation, music helps children understand and remember stories by enhancing memory and emotional engagement (www.communityplaythings.com, n.d.). Children benefit from expressive voice because it provides essential social clues that aid in language interpretation and understanding (Rachel, 2020). These storytelling techniques, which are backed by the theories of Lev Vygotsky, Howard Gardner, and Jean Chall, show how interactive, sensory rich storytelling experiences help young children improve their language skills. Children develop an emotional and cognitive connection to stories through rhyme, music, and expressive narration, which paves the way for the development of language and literacy abilities that will be essential to their further education.

In conclusion, storytelling is a powerful tool for supporting language and literacy development in young children, particularly those aged from birth to seven years. By exposing children to a wide range of vocabulary, narrative patterns, and expressive language, storytelling builds foundational skills essential for early reading and comprehension. Storytelling behaviours such as rhyme, music, and expressive voice each play a unique role in promoting these skills. Rhyme introduces children to the rhythmic and phonemic patterns within language, which helps them recognize and predict sounds, laying the groundwork for later reading and spelling abilities. Music, on the other hand, enhances emotional engagement and memory by creating an immersive auditory experience, allowing children to retain story details and understand tone more effectively.

In addition, the influence of storytelling on language and literacy development extends back even to before birth, where exposure to voices and music begins to shape a child's auditory world. Research reveals that the fetus can recognize and respond to familiar voices and musical patterns during the third trimester, which supports early neural pathways related to sound recognition, memory, and emotional bonding. This prenatal familiarity supports children's language acquisition and deepens their natural understanding and connection for rhythm and melody.

Expressive voice further contributes by providing social and contextual cues that aid in understanding and interpreting the emotional undertones of a story. As Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory suggests, the guidance of an expressive storyteller allows children to internalize language meanings, which fosters comprehension and story recalls. Together, these storytelling elements make language learning a multisensory experience, allowing children to engage not only through listening but also through prediction, rhythm, and emotional association. Supported by the theoretical insights of Jean Chall, Howard Gardner, and Vygotsky, the use of these storytelling behaviours emphasizes the role of diverse sensory inputs and guided social interaction in language learning.

By integrating storytelling behaviours that are rich in auditory, emotional, and interactive qualities, practitioners can create learning experiences that resonate deeply with children, helping them build the cognitive and linguistic skills that form the basis of future literacy. As digital tools become more prevalent, incorporating such multisensory storytelling approaches will be key to engaging children within your classroom in a modern educational way. Through engaging stories that incorporate rhyme, music, and expressive voice, children can form meaningful connections with language that support a lifetime of literacy and learning.

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Basic Acknowledgement format of AI tool use

I acknowledge the use of spell and punctuation check on 29/09/24. I used the prompt(s):

1. spell check word

2. punctuation check word

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence