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Language and Literacy skills are needed to help children express their feelings, thoughts and ideas and make sense of the world around them. According to The Education Hub (2022) storytelling for young children is essential for language and executive function development, beginning in the womb. Research by Pocwierz-Marciniak and Harciarek (2021) indicates that babies recognise maternal sounds as early as 25 weeks gestation, and by 32 weeks, they may start processing sounds and language (BBC, 2024). Therefore, engaging in activities such as reading, singing and talking to baby before birth supports bonding and early exposure to the mother tongue (Boris, 2017). Children exposed to storytelling from a young age tend to have a larger vocabulary. National Literacy Trust (2023) states that by age three, children who read or are read to hear an estimated 30 million more words. This will enable children to have more advanced language skills and better comprehension by the time they start school (Save the Children, no date). Similarly, as more digital resources are made available, children who engage in digital storybooks have significantly better digital literacy skills (McCusker, 2023). This essay will discuss the benefits of rhyme, repetition and the use of props in storytelling and evaluate the recordings of a traditional and digital story of *Room on the Broom* by Julia Donaldson (2001).

According to Read and Quirke (2018) language is learnt through listening and being read to. This helps children build their vocabulary by learning new words (Booktrust, 2024). This is supported by Vygotsky (1978) cited in Aubrey and Riley (2019) who believed that introducing stories to children at an early age can help children to achieve and build confidence. By sharing stories, children are exposed to new vocabulary or concepts that with support from an adult, children can learn increasing cognitive development and higher thinking processes (McGrath-Speaker, Taylor and Kamen (2004). However, Chomsky (1975), cited in Aubrey and Riley (2019) believed that children are born with a biological drive, called a Language Acquisition Device, to understand the way language and grammar are structured, and these rules cannot be learnt through repetition or formal teaching (Smidt, 2008).

Rhyme plays an important role in storytelling and songs and has many benefits for literacy development as early literacy and language skills are listening and speaking before reading and

writing (Little Thinkers, 2022). According to Appleby (2023) children learn sounds and syllables when exposed to rhyme in stories. When children hear the sounds within words, it is easier for them to develop an awareness of phonemes and language patterns which is a key skill for reading to decode words. Read (2014) agrees and explains that children who engage with rhyme boost their learning as it strengthens their recall of vocabulary.

Rhyme is also an important aspect of oracy which develops communication and social skills. Early Years Careers (2015) suggests that adults should encourage children to build their vocabulary, learning new words and to repeat them. This repetition allows children to recognise the language patterns needed to read and write. Moreover, Brodin and Renblad (2018) state that communication improves when children are read to, especially those with speech and language difficulties who are hearing vocabulary and can distinguish the sounds made. Furthermore, Read (2014) says sharing a story is a sociable time which creates a meaningful experience between the adult, the child and the book. According to Hart and Risley (2003) and Marjanovic-Umek, Fekonja-Peklaj and Podlesek (2012) children can develop language and vocabulary when they are surrounded by high levels of language and interaction with adults modelling conversations and vocabulary and sharing stories.

Room on the Broom is a rhyming story with identifiable, decodable words which children can not only explore the rhyming words but also blend together further encouraging reading and writing skills. Research by Little Thinkers (2022) suggests children exposed to rhyme at an early age tend to outperform those who are not academically. The reader in the video uses intonation while reading to enhance the rhyming words. To strengthen rhyming skills further the reader could pause on the second rhyming couplet for the children to predict what the word could be.

Repetition is considered another benefit of storytelling for developing literacy and language skills. Schmelzer (2015) explains that when words are repeated in stories, connections are made in children's brains that build on their language skills. These connections are called synapses which babies have from birth. When stimulated they become hardwired and repetition causes the synapses to become thicker leading to better memory so they are not pruned (Harvard University, no date). Children aged three to ten years have three times as many synapses as adults, so repetition is essential to developing language skills. The more children engage with language, the stronger these connections will be (MacBlain 2018).

Repetition for young children is not seen as boring. According to Famly (2023) children experience something new each time they revisit, building on their knowledge suggesting that concepts and words become part of their memory and can recall later. This can be linked to Piaget's cognitive development (1951) cited in MacBlain (2018). Piaget's preoperational stage is a key feature of language development where children aged between two and seven years old, engage in imaginative and symbolic play which involves an increasing use of words to represent people and objects (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). These words are repeated to gain understanding of what they mean. Additionally, Bruner (1961) cited in Joseph (2021), included repetition in his theory of the Spiral Curriculum. He explained that learning needs to be revisited and repeated by children in order to retain information and build on it.

Repetition is used in Room on the Broom. For example, the phrase "down cried the witch and they flew to the ground" and "the witch tapped the broomstick and whoosh they were gone" are used throughout the story. Heathfield (no date) suggests there are three stages of repetition, which start with children joining in with adults to repeating phrases independently. The reader in the video paused and used gestures to allow the children time to join in with the repetitive phrases.

Props were used as an addition to the traditional story. Cekaite and Bjork-Willen (2018) suggests using props can support children's language and literacy development by engaging the children, drawing their attention to listen and making them feel included in the story. Medlicott (2018) states props are useful when used to support a story making sure that the story is the main focus. In the traditional story, props were given to the children in the form of story spoons displaying the characters from the story. The reader encouraged the children to join in using their character spoon. While reading the story, at selected parts, the reader gestured to the character to engage the child to participate but made sure that reading the story was the focus. Similarly, in the digital story, no props were used as the visual display was the focus of the story.

Heathfield (no date) suggests that active participation can open pathways of communication between the reader and children listening. Additionally, Brun (2019) states that using props can enrich experiences, helping to draw the children's attention and furthering their understanding of the story. This can also increase opportunities for children to attach meaning of the word they are hearing to the prop. This is supported by Bruner (1986) cited in (Sherwood and Makar, 2022) believed that stories

can connect with new vocabulary to create meaning. The use of props allows children to make a connection between a visual prop and a new word.

The Welsh Government (2021) recognises the importance of early literacy including enjoyment of literature and rhyme. Similarly, Donaldson (2015) states that reading is an essential part of the curriculum, believing that exposure to stories can develop a love of reading to promote well-being and further learning in the future. Listening and reading are included in progression steps of the Curriculum for Wales (2021) with children listening and joining in with rhymes in stories, enjoying reading, using rhyme and new vocabulary. Donaldson (2015) also suggests that in order for children to learn to write, they must learn the basics of language structure and exposure to stories with rhyme and rhythm can achieve this. Recently, young children are being exposed with technology being used around them (Early Education, 2022) This leads Rahiem (2021) to state that the curriculum should provide opportunities for children to learn how to develop their technological skills with the Welsh Government (2021) using digital skills across the curriculum.

Settings ensure children are immersed in a language rich environment. Practitioners can support children's early literacy skills by asking open-ended questions when reading stories. Scholastic (2024) suggests asking questions to promote conversation and assess their understanding. Additionally, Torralba (no date) states that open-ended questions encourage personal viewpoints furthering engaging the child in the meaning of the story.

In recent years, digital literacy has shown to be beneficial in several ways, offering young children opportunities to engage with storytime as Merve-Yilmaz and Sigirtmac (2020) states it arouses their interests encouraging participation. According to Rahiem (2021) using a device can imitate a book with children being able to access a story before learning to read. Neumann and Neumann (2015) agree explaining that children can turn pages with a swipe of the finger and enlarge visual details that capture their interests and Fell (2018) stating that stories are more engaging when enhanced with sounds and animations. However, there are concerns that screen time can be unhealthy with Office for National Statistics (2015) reporting that children spending three hours a day online may suffer poor mental health due to issues with attention span and eye strain.

Traditional storytelling is often a shared experience between an adult and child (The Educational Hub, 2022). This promotes interactions that form emotional bonds, trust and sense of safety with is

fundamental for supporting children's learning. Additionally, literacy development can be enhanced by communication, asking questions and discussions throughout the story (Cekaite and Bjork-Willen, 2018). Whereas with a digital story, the identity of the reader is sometimes unknown with no opportunity for interaction.

For both the traditional and digital room on the broom story, the reader was able to maintain eye contact with the children whilst encouraging participation (Torralba, no date). The reader showed actions and pointing to the illustrations and used facial expressions to display emotions (Done, 2022). A change of voice was given to animate characters and the reader paused at points to give children time to anticipate the words to come (Kay, no date) with praise given to children recognising repetition in the story. The traditional story was set outdoors in a woodland setting to make a connection with the story (Robertson, 2022) with the reader adding a witch's hat as a costume. The story was read to a group of children who were encouraged to join in with the use of props.

During the digital story, the reader paused for children to join in but also because of the highlighted text (Evans, Pursoo and Williamson, 2008). According to Reading Rockets (no date) this could be beneficial for the children to follow to develop their reading skills and understand that print in books carries meaning. The moving animation and focusing on parts of the page can be engaging for children's attention, with benefits of recall and connecting the oral text to the images (Bus, Takacs and Kegel, 2015). Children were able to hear the rhythm and intonation in the digital story (Oskoz and Elola, 2016) without the distractions of the environment or props (Heathfield, no date).

Within this essay a variety of sources were used to reference theory and discussions. Three sources were selected to evaluate. Firstly, a book from MacBlain, dated in 2018. This book details theorists which have been used as a starting point to further explore chosen areas. MacBlain is a distinguished Author and Academic who works as an Educational Psychologist. His book is aimed at students with an easy to read structure giving examples of what theory looks like in practice. His books are published by a reputable publisher.

Secondly, a journal article published in 2018 exploring a study to see if reading aloud benefits children with speech and language difficulties. The article reviewed a study with children participating and a questionnaire from the adults. The source used many references that were current and built

upon older theory to support findings. The authors reflected on these findings to further support the research question. This source was found using a search on Google Scholar.

Finally, a website reference to explore benefits of literacy. The author is a Storyteller, Teacher and published Author. This article was found on another website and upon further exploration, it linked to a youtube video of him telling a story and his personal website, where more information was found to add to his credentials. This information was basic but useful to include and then further research gained to go into depth in the essay.

At first, resources were hard to find but after exploring further and prompting Google with the right question, sources became easier to find. AI was not used to find sources or references.

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