

Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

According to Isik (2016), storytelling allows children to engage in and develop their language acquisition in their mother tongue and allows children to develop second languages by learning new words and phrases through the influence of storytelling. Children develop their literacy skills through storytelling as they are encountering rhymes, metaphors, phrases, and new vocabulary and children benefit from this as they are expanding on their oral language through literacy, Dennis (2011). Digital literacy has developed greatly over the years and allows children to access a range of books online on a tablet, phone, or a kindle through different uses of online media such as storytelling videos, e-books, or nursery rhymes on PowerPoint, Rowberry (2018). Throughout this paper, the focus will be on the use of rhyming in books, the importance of tone of voice during storytelling, and the use of asking questions during reading.

The use of rhyme was applied during the storytelling activity in both the traditional storytelling and also the digital storytelling activity. In the traditional storytelling activity, rhyming was used heavily in the book especially when emphasising on the title of the story within the book with 'Wwsh' and 'Brwsh' and whilst reading through the story, children may become more confident and have an understanding of when the next rhyming word will appear as they are following the same pattern throughout the book. The digital storytelling activity also included rhyming which allowed children to recognise the rhythm of rhyming as the title of the book was repeated throughout the story multiple times and children were then encouraged to remember the rhyming words and the practitioner would not say the last word for the children to have the opportunity to recite the rhyme for themselves, Hall-Kenyon, Culatta, Black (2012).

Rhyme may be difficult for children to notice during digital reading as the typed words may not be as noticeable as in a book. During the traditional storytelling activity, the rhyming words were enlarged in a different font and were bigger compared to other words which allowed children to familiarise themselves with the rhyming words and when they would be appearing and the pattern in which they appeared throughout the book, Richland (2021).

Children's oracy and reading skills are developed widely by being exposed to rhymes as it allows children to listen to the rhythm of the words and clap along to it or even to predict what words or phrases may be coming next during storytelling, Bower (2018). Whilst storytelling, practitioners must have the correct knowledge and resources to support children whilst reading along to rhyming books as the more familiar and confident children get with acknowledging when rhyming

words appear, they can use this as an advantage to better their reading skills as they will have the confidence to apply it.

David Crystal (1996) states that the importance of rhyme and words or sounds that are repeated can have an effect on children from 7 months old as the rhythm and repetition develop children's speech similarly to Bower, children's reading will also be affected positively as children as their vocabulary will have widened through listening to nursery rhymes.

Nursery rhymes promote positive environments within classrooms and through storytelling and singing, children are developing their language acquisition. Children are exposed to instructions of listening and this may be applied to better children's communication skills and their language skills such as expanding on their vocabulary and speaking, Pourkalhor, O. & Tavakoli, M. (2017). Children develop their communication and language by listening to nursery rhymes as they are short and repetitive, children may find it easier to remember what they have heard and repeat the pattern of the rhythm to develop their phonological awareness, PACEY (2019). However, Wray and Medwell (1993) cited in Bower (2014) that although children may benefit from storytelling and nursery rhymes, the language and the repetition and telling of nursery rhymes is not how everybody speaks on a daily basis and a specific language is used for stories and nursery rhymes to engage children during storytelling.

Rhyming can promote children's digital literacy skills as there are a lot of digital platforms online that allows children to listen to nursery rhymes or audio books online. During school time or at home, children can use their time to listen to nursery rhymes and become familiar with the different patterns and phrases that occur in different nursery rhymes as there are a variety of choice which allows children to become familiar with a wide range of new expressions and phrases, Pentagon Play (2021). November also hosts the week of 'World Nursery Rhymes' and this initiative has widened the range of online resources that are available digitally for children to access. Websites such as Twinkl and Sparkle Box allow children to read different nursery rhymes with photos that correspond to each story.

The skill of tone of voice was applied during the storytelling activity to engage children in the story they were being read both digitally and traditionally. Both books in the activity included speech from different characters within the books and allowed for tone of voice to be changed throughout by applying different voices for each character. Kowal (2006) states that changing one's tone of voice for each different character allows children to differentiate between every character and

children may be made aware of the character that is speaking if they cannot physically see the story.

Digital storytelling activities may range from other people reading books online, presentations of books, or a digital device reading out a story out loud. Tone of voice may differ on a digital device as many online devices have audio that can be monotone and have no change in the tone of voice whilst storytelling. Taylor (no date) expresses that in order for children to not read monotone or pause when they see punctuation marks, they must be read to with expression and an emphasis on the importance of punctuation and what it means during storytelling. Theorist Eve Clark (2007) states that children that are exposed to words and different expressions that are unfamiliar to them, children may be expected to repeat what they have heard in the same expression and tone as the adult. Children mirror the tone of voice and enthusiasm in expression that they hear during digital and traditional storytelling which allow children to engage in the story and truly capture what the story is all about.

Tone of voice can help to develop children's use of language as during storytelling practitioners or parents can read to children with different expressions and emotions which will allow children to enjoy and learn about the story that they are reading which may then result in children learning new vocabulary with every book they read, Baby Sparks (2020). Storytelling can help to build children's language and work on their memory skills, and this may develop more so during digital storytelling as some online websites ask questions at the end of stories to allow children to truly understand the meaning and the plot of the story that they have read.

Westlund *et al* (2017) states that in reflection from their studies, children that are exposed to expressive reading conditions during storytelling tend to better retain what they have heard and could relay the story in more description and detail than a child that has listened to the story with no expressions during the activity. During the study, children that were listening to the expressive robot, rather than the monotone robot, showed more expression on their face during the storytelling activity and were emotionally engaged with the story and acquired new vocabulary as the children were listening intently to the robot.

In both the traditional storytelling activity and the digital storytelling activity, questions were asked throughout both to ask the children what they thought would be coming up next in the book or if the children had read it previously, do they remember what comes next. The Welsh Government (2016) state that parents must have awareness of the importance of asking questions to children whilst reading especially questions that will encourage children's inquisitiveness. The use of

questions may come easier to children when reading traditional books as they may be familiar with certain books by having access to them in schools or at home whereas digital devices are expensive and not all schools and homes can afford to have devices in which children can read books online, Larson (2015). Due to not having access to digital devices, some children may be unfamiliar with some books, in comparison to children with digital devices, and will be unable to answer questions on the story if they are not familiar with it.

Children that are reading through digital media could work with other children and read the stories to each other whilst asking open ended questions as they are reading along so that the children that are reading have an understanding of what is happening in the story and what they think may happen next. Some children may have complications when it comes to reading books and digital storytelling allows all children to have experiences of different stories and this could be from somebody reading a story online or acting the story out with puppets or photos in order for children that may not be able to read can understand what the story is about and to learn new vocabulary, Raheim (2021).

However, a long period of digital use has been studied and may have a long-term effect on children and a risk of language delay as too much use of digital devices may impact children's cognitive development and their ability to pay attention and focus on a daily basis. Maulana (2020) acknowledges that an impact on children's risk of language delay has been confirmed to have increased with the more digital screen time they are consuming and states that parents and practitioners should be encouraging the minimum amount of screen time a day which may result in less children using digital devices to read and using traditional storytelling books more.

By asking a range of questions during storytelling, students can act on the new knowledge they have learnt from the book they have read, and practitioners can rely on asking questions to have an understanding of children's progress and the information they have gained during the storytelling activity. Practitioners may ask questions during storytelling activities that allows children to recall what may be coming up next in the book or if they want to give suggestions as to what may be coming up next in the book, Millard & Gaunt (2018). However, studies have shown that parents and practitioners that read with their children through traditional storytelling using books, have better interactions through communication with the children and the children are more engaged with the reading through a book in comparison to a digital device, World Economic Forum (2021).

The use of questions and communicating with children during storytelling, according to theorist Tomasello, children are developing on their language patterns and structures to identify what adults are asking them during storytelling or the information they are being given. Tomasello believed that children construct their language and their knowledge of basic language rules and grammar through communication and adults having an input in children's oral and language development, Language Debates (2019)

To conclude, both the digital and traditional storytelling activity included aspects of asking questions, the change in tone of voice, and the use of rhyme in both stories. There are many qualities that a storyteller needs to engage with their readers whilst partaking in both digital and traditional storytelling activities in order to develop new vocabulary in children and for children to develop on their reading, oracy and language skills. Tone of Voice could be improved further by ensuring there are different voices for each different characters to allow children to familiarise themselves with the character speaking and further questions may be asked by asking children if they understand what is going on in the story and if they have any questions about what has happened in the story so far.

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