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Reflection on storytelling

Introduction

Storytelling is essential in early childhood, supporting children from before birth to around seven years. It promotes speaking, emotional understanding, imagination, social skills, and early literacy (Liu et al., 2024). Even before birth, exposure to stories and voices aids brain development, language, attention, and memory (Yabe et al., 2018, Férez Mora and Coyle, 2023). Listening to stories helps children learn vocabulary, sentence structure, rhythm, and meaning, improving later reading and writing skills (Nedovic, 2023, Duke University, 2022). The study says young children feel, think, and move when using digital media (Pressreader.com, 2025).

In early childhood (up to age seven), children develop basic reading and writing skills, including clear speech, sound recognition, print awareness, writing, and story comprehension (Hamill & Campbell, 2019, Liu et al., 2024). Storytelling-both traditional and digital-links spoken language to literacy, strengthening these skills (Agosto, 2016, Bowyer-Crane et al., 2016).

In addition to traditional literacy, children need digital literacy (Creative Educator, n.d., Rahiem, 2021). The ability to use digital tools to access, create, and share information. Digital storytelling, using sound, images, text, and interactivity, helps children interpret, create, and analyse media, extending skills beyond print literacy (Eynon, 2020, Férez Mora and Coyle, 2023, Rahiem, 2021)

This study explores two storytelling activities-a digital Chicken story and a traditional Dreaming Bear story-analysing children's storytelling skills, their impact on literacy and digital literacy, and the key differences between the approaches, using recorded observations and supporting research.

Digital storytelling "Chicken":

A TV displayed an animated or illustrated chicken story with audio narration and interactive features. Children aged 4–5 engaged by listening, asking questions, retelling parts, and interacting with the story. The session was recorded for later review (Creative Educator, n.d., Rahiem, 2021).

Traditional storytelling “Dreaming Bear”:

The story was read aloud in a circle, using props and expressive gestures. Children participated by retelling, asking questions, or acting out the bear’s dream. The session was recorded for observation and analysis (Heinemann.com, 2022, Nedovic, 2023).

Analysis of storytelling behaviours and skills observed

After reviewing the recordings, several important storytelling behaviors and skills were noticed during the two activities.

- **Use of voice, pacing, gestures, and engagement**

In the traditional “Dreaming Bear” story (Activity B), a variety of voice changes were used. For example, a lower tone when the bear lay down and in a softer voice during the dream parts, it paused intentionally to create suspense (Liu et al., 2024). Also, questions were asked to involve the children, like, “What do you think the bear sees?” Gestures and props were used to show parts of the dream (Global Partnership for Education, 2024). These actions follow good practices in early childhood storytelling. It helps children stay interested by showing how stories are structured and using expression, gestures, and repetition to keep children engaged (Creative Educator, n.d., Nedovic, 2023, Pressreader.com, 2025)

The recording showed that the children leaned forward, kept eye contact, sometimes repeated key phrases like “the bear slept” and “he saw stars,” and made spontaneous predictions such as “maybe the bear dreams of honey.” These behaviours showed they were very engaged with the spoken language and starting to develop storytelling skills (Férez Mora and Coyle, 2023, Global Partnership for Education, 2024).

In contrast, during the digital “Chicken” story (Activity A), some of the expressive parts came from the digital format itself. This included voice-over narration, animated visuals of the chicken, and sound effects. The teacher’s role changed to guiding and encouraging the children (Eynon, 2020). The story was paused at times to ask children to tap the screen or choose what the chicken should do next. The children responded by touching icons, using interactive features, and sharing their ideas (like “The chicken will fly!” or “The egg cracked!”). This shows a clear difference between traditional storytelling, where an adult is the main narrator, and digital storytelling, where the medium helps tell the story and the children participate more actively (Eynon, 2020, Purnama et al., 2022, Rahiem, 2021).

- **Supporting children's storytelling skills**

After the storytelling session in Activity B, the children were asked to retell the story in pairs. They used questions like, "What happened first? What happened next? And then what did the bear dream?" Many children tried to retell the story using sequencing words, such as "First the bear, then the star, then the honey." The practitioner helped them by asking questions like, "Yes, and what did he feel?" and "Where did he go in his dream?" This method follows the idea that adults can support children's storytelling by showing how stories are structured, asking questions like "what," "where," and "why," and encouraging children to think about the characters and events (Creative Educator, n.d.).

In Activity A, the digital story had prompts built in, like "What will the chicken do next? Tap one of the buttons," and the practitioner paused at important points to ask children what they thought would happen next. For example, before the egg cracked, they asked, "What do you think will happen?" to encourage responses. After the story, children were asked to draw what the chicken might do the next day and write one sentence about it (Badrkhani, 2018). This approach combined storytelling with digital tools, helping children develop early writing and multi-modal literacy skills (Creative Educator, n.d., Purnama et al., 2022).

- **Children's participation, retelling, and multimodal responses**

In the recording of Activity B, several children volunteered to act out the bear's dream. One child lay down to show the sleeping bear, another stretched out their arms to resemble tree branches, and a third made a star shape above. This performance showed represented storytelling, where children worked together to build the story through physical actions and creative play (Nedovic, 2023). The adult-led story gave a flexible framework that encouraged children to interpret and add to the story in their own ways (Férez Mora and Coyle, 2023).

In the recording of Activity A, after the digital story, the children were asked to record their voices to share what they thought the chicken would do next. They used a voice recorder and listened to their recordings with classmates (Badrkhani, 2018). Some children also interacted with on-screen icons such as the chicken, egg, and farmer—by dragging like the chicken, egg, and farmer—dragging and moving them to continue the story. This activity shows how children used multiple ways to tell stories, combining talking, digital tools, and audio recordings. These activities are examples of "digital storytelling," where different ways of communication come together to create and share meaning (Heinemann.com, 2022, Yu and Wang, 2024).

Differences in storytelling approaches

Analysis shows clear differences between traditional and digital storytelling.

- First, in traditional stories, adults tell the story using their voice and gestures. In digital stories, technology is used, such as animation, sound, and interactivity. Adults help with these tools, but do not control the story (The role of stories in literacy development, n.d.)
- Second, children participate differently. In traditional stories, children respond by speaking or acting out parts. In digital stories, children interact with screens. They record voices, move icons, and create written or drawn responses (Maureen, van der Meij and de Jong, 2021).
- Third, scaffolding is different. Traditional scaffolding uses spoken sequences, questions, and gestures. Digital scaffolding uses prompts, predictions, recordings, and follow-up writing or drawing. The tools are suited to each type of story (Maureen, van der Meij and de Jong, 2021).
- Fourth, engagement varies. Digital stories attract children through interactivity and sensory features. Traditional stories use voice, expression, and acting to engage children. Both methods help children think and feel (Yabe et al., 2018, Yu and Wang, 2024).

How could the activity promote children's oracy, reading or writing?

Both storytelling activities offer good chances to help children develop their speaking and listening (oracy), and their early reading and writing skills (Agosto, 2016).

Oracy:

In traditional stories, children hear expressive language and new words. They respond to questions and act out parts of the story. This helps improve listening skills such as paying attention, predicting, and responding (Samuel, 2024). It also improves speaking skills like retelling, sequencing, and thinking about characters (Spencer and Pierce, 2022) In digital stories, children predict what will happen, retell stories using voice recordings, and describe events with icons. Recording their voices helps them reflect on their language, listen to peers, and become more aware of language use (Agosto, 2016, Kervin and Mantei, 2016).

Reading and writing:

Both activities help children increase their vocabulary, understand stories, and learn the order of events. Digital stories include interactive icons and captions, which help children become aware of print. Children also draw pictures and write sentences about the story (Munajah, Sumantri and Yufiarti, 2022). This links their spoken ideas to writing and supports early reading skills. Research shows that using structured storytelling improves early language and print knowledge (Maureen, van der Meij and de Jong, 2021, Spencer and Pierce, 2022).

How could the activity promote children's digital literacy skills?

Digital literacy means beyond using devices; it includes understanding, creating, navigating, and communicating through digital media (Badrkhani, 2018 , Samuel, 2024)

In the digital "Chicken" story, children interacted with the interface by tapping icons, listening to sounds, recording their voices, and sharing their creations. This helped develop important digital skills:

Technical skills: Using touch screens, managing recordings, and navigating menus (Billington, 2016, Kervin and Mantei, 2016).

Multimodal understanding: Making sense of images, animations, sounds, and icons. (Kervin and Mantei, 2016).

Creativity: Recording their ideas let children create content instead of just viewing or listening (Agosto, 2016, Billington, 2016)

Reflection: Listening to their recordings helped them evaluate and improve (Agosto, 2016, Kervin and Mantei, 2016).

Audience awareness: Sharing recordings taught children how to communicate with others (Billington, 2016, The role of stories in literacy development, n.d., Samuel, 2024)

Comparison and contrast

Compared to the traditional story, which mainly focused on speaking and reading skills, the digital story also builds digital skills. This helps children become confident, creative, and thoughtful digital communicators (Samuel, 2024).

Similarities:

- Both stories follow a beginning, middle, and end structure. They encourage children to predict what will happen and retell the story. They help children learn new words and participate actively ((Hughes, 2025, Munajah, Sumantri and Yufiarti, 2022).
- Both methods support speaking, listening, and acting out stories. The digital version also includes writing tasks, while the traditional method encourages children to draw or write after the story (Hughes, 2025, Lisenbee and Ford, 2017).
- In both cases, children are active participants. This increases their engagement, understanding, and creativity (Hughes, 2025, Lisenbee and Ford, 2017).

Differences:

According to Munajahh, Sumantri and Yufiarti, 2022) there are some differences between traditional and digital storytelling

- Medium: Traditional storytelling uses speech and gestures. Digital storytelling uses technology with sound, pictures, and interactive features.
- Children's roles: Traditional involves listening, acting, and retelling. Digital involves interacting with devices, recording, and creating stories together.
- Focus on literacy: Traditional emphasizes oral skills and early reading. Digital adds skills like using computers and multimedia tools.
- Role of adults: Traditional storytellers guide children. Digital facilitators help children use technology and learn.
- Scaffolding: Traditional uses voice, gestures, and questions. Digital uses screen prompts, recording tools, and interactive features
- Engagement: Digital uses visuals, sounds, and interactions. Traditional relies on face-to-face communication, expressions, and emotions (Munajah, Sumantri and Yufiarti, 2022).

Linking to theory and research

Storytelling is connected to some theories about language and literacy. These theories explain how storytelling helps children learn to read and write.

Socio-cultural theory: Vygotsky states that learning happens through social interaction. Adults help children learn by giving prompts and questions. This support occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (Lai, 2023)

Jerome Bruner's idea is that kids learn best when they're actively trying to make sense of things, and storytelling plays a big role in how they see and understand the world. He explained that children use narratives to organise experiences, understand cause and effect, and express ideas. Bruner also stressed the role of scaffolding- adult support through interaction and dialogue- to help children learn independently (Bruner, 1986, Ismail et al., 2023).

According to Chomsky, children don't just copy what they hear; instead, they use their natural ability to create and understand new sentences. In storytelling, his idea suggests that listening to and participating in stories helps children activate their language skills. This allows them to practice grammar, vocabulary, and sentence patterns in real situations (Chomsky, 1965, Nor and Rashid, 2018).

B.F. Skinner's behaviourist idea is that kids pick up language by copying what they see and hear, and they get encouraged when they do it right. When telling stories, grown-ups help kids talk better by praising what they say or responding to them. This encourages children to keep practicing and get better at using words (Nor and Rashid, 2018, Skinner, 1957).

Implications for Practice and Possible Improvements

According to (Lisenbee and Ford, 2017)

- Both storytelling approaches give useful ideas and spots where they can improve.
- Pausing for predictions keeps children engaged and can be used in both digital and traditional storytelling.

- In digital sessions, ensure the technology is simple and distraction-free so children can focus on the story.
 - Traditional stories can include small digital extensions, like drawing or recording parts of the story.
- . Encouraging kids to change or work together on stories helps them get more creative and improves their writing and storytelling abilities.
- Balance digital and face-to-face storytelling to support both attention and social-emotional learning.
 - Add short writing or drawing tasks after storytelling to connect speaking, drawing, and writing.
 - Review children retells or recordings to assess vocabulary, story flow, and language development.

Limitations

The analysis is based on two sessions and may not reflect long-term effects. Digital storytelling can boost short-term engagement, but consistent support is needed for lasting literacy progress. Some digital tools, especially those with excessive animations, may reduce comprehension (Zack et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This paper examined two storytelling activities: a digital “Chicken” story and a traditional “Dreaming Bear” story. The traditional story focused on adult-led narration, incorporating gestures and dramatization, while the digital story engaged children collaboratively, allowing them to record parts of the story and interact with multimedia tools.

Storytelling makes learning fun and creative. It helps children use their imagination, learn new words, and think about stories in different ways. Teachers can build on stories by asking questions, acting them out, or making new endings together (Giannikas, 2023).

Both methods helped develop speaking skills, early reading, and writing. The digital activity also added a boost to digital literacy.

This work involved the use of generative AI tools, specifically Grammarly, for the review of grammatical and syntactical errors. Additionally, ChatGPT and Copilot were used to find the latest sources, including e-books, journal articles, and websites.

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