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1. Spelling and Grammar 2. Immersive Reader 3. Microsoft Editor

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Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

Introduction

Crawford, Roberts, and Lacina (2024) highlight that picture books play a crucial role in learning, providing experiences that offer meaning through sharing invaluable time in a nurturing environment. Reciprocation occurs between the reader and child through interactions, visually comparing and exploring pictures that relate to the story's words. The use of picture books can enhance interaction and communication through responses while enhancing comprehension of words. BookTrust (2023) agree with this, as they aim to help children in the crucial developmental years, from vulnerable, and low-income families from birth to primary school. Facilitating time to read with children from the earliest age establishes a regular reading routine, which can be beneficial overtime. Laing and Bergleson (2020) state that research has made connections between initial language such as first words and baby chatter. Over the course of time, this will become more distinct, gaining momentum which represents talking. (Menn and Vihman, 2011, Oller et al.).

Storytelling is a part of children's primary language proficiency. Reading in the home, fosters shared reading between parents and children, increasing children's understanding and encouraging competent storytelling (Marjanovič-Umek, et al., 2012). Ramos (2012) believes children will benefit from exposure and the use of books from birth, establishing the enjoyment of stories from infancy. It makes literature captivating from the first stages of development. Auger *et al.* (2014) agrees with this pointing out, mothers with a history of positive reading experiences will introduce quality reading time with their children. When there is a passion for reading books and understanding the benefits, the shared experience is meaningful and engaging.

Vissar-Bochane *et, al.* (2019) state that caregivers should promote the foundations of language development, as this is a vital skill that lasts a lifetime. Whitehead (2009)

emphasises that stories can be repeated or practised, children repeat movements that bring excitement and provide new sensory experiences. Familiar stories, songs, and words can be listened to and repeated by young children. The reader enhanced the digital story by introducing an action song about a caterpillar's life cycle where the children could join in. This relates to the spiral curriculum theory, where children revisit and repeat actions. This process promotes reinforcement of learnt skills through practice and repetition. Bruner recognised children display an innate ability to learn language and are active participants in the process (Bruner,1982). Montag *et al.* (2015) emphasises children revisiting the same story on countless occasions will enhance vocabulary. According to Hibbin (2016) It is evident, that oral storytelling intensifies story themes and characters. During story time, readers enhance children's intrinsic commitment, which provide an opportunity to look past oneself. This allows children to build an understanding of dispositions, behaviours, and emotions, which provide a sense of identity Hibbin (2016). According to Berkowitz (2011), oral storytelling positively impacts holistic development. This provides time for children to participate in creative activities, promoting imagination, communication, and language skills within a group.

Intonation

Wilkinson (2019) emphasises the importance of making story time fun and interactive to keep the children engaged, to develop their curiosity and affection for books and stories. During both traditional and digital stories, the reader provided many facial expressions and exaggerated body movements which included hand gestures. The reader used intonations, different voices, and pauses to keep the children entertained, that promotes a fun and exciting interactive story session. Medlicott (2019) states that adults need to make story time interesting yet fun, reading at an appropriate pace, using different animated voices for characters and making intentional pauses to allow time for children to gather their thoughts and join in. To build excitement, practitioners should use dramatic changes in pitch and intonation and use a multiplicity of voices (Cekaite and Bjork-Willen, 2018). According to Barbee (2021) the prosodic features of speech are particularly important not only for what we say, but how we say it. Words alone are not

enough to portray meaning. Therefore, we need to use prosodies, which are variables in our speech that effect how a message is communicated. Prosodies are affected by factors such as pace, intonation, volume, pitch, and paralinguistic features where speech and communication are assisted by facial expressions, gestures, body language and posture. However, if paralinguistic features are portrayed incorrectly, the meaning can be missed. Gestures can support what we want to say, however, they can also contradict and portray a different message entirely.

Rhyme

The reader chose a rhyming story for the traditional reading session, that contained rhyming text and repetition. According to Bower (2014) It is widely believed that children's language skills, reading and writing can be supported by using rhyme, rhythm, and repetition. McKay (2023) states children that share stories which include rhyme and repetition can be exciting and engaging. Children are likely to predict certain parts of the story, which promotes excitement and encourages willingness to participate and interact with the storyteller. Stories that contain rhyme, can also enhance vocabulary as children use memory skills and benefit from word retention (Read *et al*,2014). Introducing rhymes to children from an early age intrinsically provides spoken language which is easy to engage with, retain and repeat (Kuppen 2018). The traditional and digital stories the reader chose, emphasised key words using different pitch and tones which encourages children to turn take and join in, to become part of the story. Children are stimulated through the sounds of rhyme and will vocalise using the same or similar sounds. When recognising rhyming in sounds and words, children facilitate their auditory distinction by creating prosodic patterns of rhythm and sounds Burke (2019). However, Medlicott (2019) indicates that if a story is being read mundanely with no pitch or intonation, children will lose interest and disengage.

Props

Greimann (2017) points out the importance of engaging children in creating or sourcing props, to help children interact with the reader during the narrative. Whitehead (2009) agrees with this, and highlights making story props is a magical way of bringing story

books to life. Providing props is beneficial to children to enable them to recall and re-tell stories. The Empowered Educator (2023) acknowledges children unable or unwilling to listen and the significance of creating a story time that everyone can be included in, share, and appreciate. Using props during story time can improve attention and interest. According to the curriculum for funded non-maintained settings children should be supported and encouraged to have access to books and stories through shared reading experiences (Welsh Government, 2022a). The reader used a selection of props including several farm animals which are identified in the traditional story, and real fruit displayed in a basket, which supported the narrative within the digital story. The children had the chance to explore the props, using their senses while comparing and referring to the pictures within both stories. Vasalou *et al.* (2020) discusses when children play with props it enhances imagination and promotes the use of descriptive language. It can offer a valuable opportunity to revisit, investigate, and discuss further with others. (Burke, 2019, p.36) suggests when props are provided for children, they should be relatable, functional, and appropriate for re-in-acting stories and facilitate dramatic role play, as these items will be well used. During the traditional story, the reader provides opportunity for children to imitate the behaviours and sounds of animals, to visually make comparisons and connections that relate to the story. The reader also provided traditional story books in Welsh and English text to look at either during or after the digital story had finished. This successfully promoted interaction and conversation, this links to Languages, Literacy and Communication Guidance (Welsh Government 2022c). Brodin and Renblad (2020) discuss the importance of allowing children access to books after the story has been told, which encourages development of communication and reading skills. The children can also reflect on the story and share information whilst interacting with others.

According to Kucirkova (2018) the carpet environment is ideally positioned for group-based reading by a practitioner focused on one story. This form of reading participation is based on socio-cultural theories of early childhood education, which emphasises dialogue. However, in a traditional print book the format of the book is an essential tool of group reading sessions, which can be shared in a variety of sizes, hardback, and paperback. However, current digital books (such as iPads and Google Chrome books)

are designed for individual use or small group readings and are not very practical for larger groups Kucirkova (2018).

Harrison and McTavish (2016) completed a study which identified that there is potential to develop language and literacy with the use of technology through educational apps, that work alongside children being exposed to social interactions. The curriculum for funded, non-maintained settings focus on developing skills so children can save and retrieve digital work, access apps, recognise icons and produce a camera roll (Welsh Government, 2022b). Emerging is a digital world, changing and fast moving. Where adults may find it difficult to keep up with modern technology, young children feel comfortable with the use of digital devices, this can happen even before language acquisition is established (Harrison and McTavish 2016). According to (Erstad *et al.*, 2020) fast technological changes have a long-term effect on the development of early literacy, parents and practitioners have a significant role in facilitating children to help them prepare for a digital future. The Curriculum for Wales states that capable learners who are ambitious should be exposed to and engage in technological and scientific change. This will deepen understanding and can help learners to lead fulfilling lives, contributing to culture and society in many ways (Welsh Government, 2019). Donaldson (2015) points out that digital understanding is necessary in this society, so it is imperative that children are given time to develop these skills in conjunction with other essential skills that are required The Digital Competence Framework is dedicated to all children. This provides a proficient level of digital comprehension to help them in the future (Welsh Government, 2018). Rahiem (2021) found that when teachers use basic digital technologies, storytelling becomes significantly more dynamic, engaging, and theatrical. This method enhances children's learning experiences by making them more exciting and communicative. However, Ponti (2023) states' growing use of screen time in young children is linked to changes of inactive behaviour, less physical activity, and changes in sleep patterns. According to Bus (2015) electronic storybooks are interesting as they are stimulating and interactive, which promotes the listener to engage when listening to the narrative of the story. Children can also relate the story to the illustrations and sounds on screen. The technology provides a distinct experience in comparison to a traditional story book. Electronic devices have numerous features, such

as sounds, music, and animated pictures that encourage interest and engagement for young children. However, Ponti (2023) argues that young children struggle to recognise and relate to real life from what they observe on digital devices, therefore, children cannot productively learn. Children learn best through face-to-face interaction. Early learning is most enriching and significant when the experience is lived and when interaction occurs with real people.

Conclusion

To conclude, investigations that have taken place through research and evidence evaluated have shown significant benefits to children accessing digital technology through apps and programmes that underpin language and literacy development. That intonation, rhyme and props support learning and are a valuable link to enhancing understanding through storytelling. Nevertheless, digital technology should never substitute traditional storytelling or real-life interactions, as these encourage children to become more involved and build confidence through communication. Combining these elements can enhance language and literacy experiences that are dynamic and rich in culture. Furthermore, in the ever-changing society, children need to have access to digital resources to develop digital skills that will be beneficial to them in the future. Whilst completing this assignment literature provided on the reading academic list was highly informative and relevant. Whitehead (2009) *Supporting language and literacy development in the early years*, was a useful and relevant source however, older in date than other academic literature available. It was relatable from a good practise perspective which was rich in experience and knowledgeable as the author covered a vast amount of case studies. It provided concise guidance to early years practitioners of how to nurture and support children's language and literacy development. It was particularly informative in relation to storytelling, the use of props, and digital literacy. The book online was simple to navigate, and the layout was user-friendly. In contrast (Erstad et al., 2020) *The Routledge Handbook of Digital Literacies in Early Childhood* was challenging to read and the narrative was more complex and confusing. However, a reference was made from this source which touched upon the importance of parents

and practitioners facilitating access to digital resources to prepare children for the future in a digital society. Furthermore, this was an academic source which was recent and relevant.

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