

**The use of stories in the primary classroom: The different methods of
engagement and facilitation.**

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Declaration

I can confirm that this major independent study constitutes my own work.

I can confirm that the text of the submission does not exceed the upper word limit of
8800 words.

Student:

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Abstract

The use of stories in the primary classroom: The different methods of engagement and facilitation.

By Leah Eve Robinson

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This study discusses the findings of my small scale research in order to analyse the approach of engaging and enhancing story provision in schools.

The aims of this study were to discover the variety of approaches that children take to engage with stories and how the environment can enhance and facilitate this.

Participant observations were conducted to examine a range of children interacting with stories across two settings. The data was used to highlight the key concepts of engagement with story and how this was facilitated by the environment and practitioner.

The observations were analysed using contextual analysis, which allowed myself to focus on the key elements of engagement and facilitation and enabled me to find comparisons between the observations.

The main finding from the observations was that, across both settings, children used a manipulative such as a story prop whilst engaging with story.

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Acronyms

EAL – English as an Additional Language

ECAT – Every Child a Talker

ECL-B – English Childhood Longitudinal Birth Cohort

EYFS – Early Years Foundation Stage

1. Introduction

An area of study I am highly concerned with is the development of language and literacy skills in the primary classroom. Due to my subject specialism in English, communication and language development for young children is an area I feel is vital to future development. If fostered and nurtured during early years this can enable children to flourish and achieve their full potential.

I intended to investigate an aspect of communication and language development that interested me. Stories within education are an influential aspect of pedagogy whose presence may have diminished in the classroom over time. Michael Morpurgo, children's laureate, believes story time within schools should be reinstated to allow children time to imagine rather than being tested (Furness, 2013). After reading this article by Morpurgo it sparked my curiosity regarding the different ways stories are currently utilised in schools.

I believe stories have a valued place within the classroom, therefore, I used this as my main focus for my study. The main questions that I wish to investigate are:

- How do children engage and interact with stories?
- How does the environment facilitate and enhance the use of story?

To begin with, I reviewed the relevant literature around the use of stories in order to gain a better understanding of people's interpretation of story. I did this by looking at how the use of stories in the classroom has changed over time and the way story differs between cultures. I then dissected the engagement and enhancement of story within a primary classroom setting by referring to relevant and current literature. I also considered the value of story within curriculum documentation. This literature

was then subsequently used to analyse my own data in relation to engagement and facilitation of stories within schools.

2. Literature Review

2.1 What is Story?

To different people, story can have various meanings. For some, it may be simply reading a book and learning new words, to others retelling and sharing a favourite story, alternatively creating a play to retell events that have occurred.

In many ways, story can be what you desire it to be. It allows an abundance of imagination and innovation. Story should be an active exercise that engages, inspires and motivates children to recreate and retell, Clegg & Birch (2002:213) confirm this by suggesting that story is not solely for entertainment purposes, but it is also a strategy for improving creativity.

Daniel (2012:3) shows how children engage with story, when it is used to its full potential, “the listeners’ eyes widen, the lips part and the body leans forward as the tale transports them to another time and another place.”

This explores how captivating story can be for a young child, how they are able to feel as though they themselves are involved first-hand directly in the story. By ‘transporting them to another time and another place’ the author believes children should be engrossed in a fantasy world where anything is possible. The same is believed by Widdowson (1983. Cited in: Garvie, 1990:25): “All the world loves a story and wants to know how it ends. Before they know where they are they have learnt a lot of other things besides.”

Here Widdowson conceives that story can mean much more to development than is often given credit for, explaining how story can not only engage children’s imagination; it can also aid their language and communication growth. Children are

able to learn about new concepts and become familiar with new words. This is supported by Dickinson et al (1994, Cited in Ezell & Justice, 2005:8) who considers that the degree to which stories are routinely incorporated into daily experiences at school influences both positively and negatively the children's academic achievements in the areas of communication and language. An example of a positive influence would be ensuring each day there was enough thought and time dedicated to stories.

2.2 Story through time

Numerous stories that we use today originated from decades or even centuries ago. They are based around historical events or morals and life lessons that are passed down from our ancestors and have survived several generations. Previously, some stories were primarily used for their purpose of teaching and sharing customs and values (Little Bear, 2000:81).

Stories have been a way of life for many. During the Anglo-Saxon times, storytellers were known as gleemen. The concept of communicating thoughts and ideas and teaching each other through the word of story still exists today (Grainger, 1997:17). Albeit, stories would not have been shared in the same way we do currently. Stories originated as soon as men had the ability to speak. Tales were created to mark an occasion or to warn of danger (Zipes, 2011:2). Presently, stories are used frequently and readily with people of all ages.

Nevertheless, some stories are created for the purpose of reading for pleasure and to spark curiosity in children. An example of this is the infamous story '*The tiger who came to tea*'. This book does not teach about a real life issue, it is an interesting and stimulating concept within a book for children. Shea (2012:113) explains this use of

books to generate imagination for children within early years. She believes when a teacher reads aloud to children it expands on their previous knowledge and creates interested and inquisitive learners.

A study by Grinberg evidences how stories have been used as a teaching tool since the 1930's. In reviewing the programme, Grinberg (2002:1452) argues that storytelling as a teaching method enabled prospective professionals to create connections from the classroom environment to the children's home lives. This indicates the importance of story for the educator, not only for the students, allowing professionals to become more accustomed to the children's needs and individual differences.

Historically, stories have played a fundamental role in education. It is not an innovative pedagogy that has been developed; it has been continued due to its natural and valued presence within society. Grainger (1997:13) describes story as an "ancient art form" one that plays an "integral part of human existence and the most enduring form of education." Meek (1991:103) maintains this ideology by defining story as a means of narration by which humans compose and characterise their world. The terminology 'integral' establishes how crucial stories, reading and narration are to our everyday lives and have been for countless years.

2.3 Story in cultures

Story is not only influential within the UK education system; it is widely recognised as a universal method of promoting language, literacy and communication skills. A study by Chou (2014:292) in Taiwan demonstrated this multi-cultural use of story, through engagement in observations and interviews with children. They stated that:

Eight pupils reported that the storyline and pictures in the storybooks provided them with more visual stimuli to comprehend new words they were learning than the English songs they were using.

Therefore the researchers concluded that EAL children flourished with their English language ability due to illustrations aiding the comprehension of the written word.

The possibility of other significant factors may determine comprehension such as finding the stories more engaging and enticing than the songs.

Rosen (1985, cited in Garvie, 1990:86) supports this by describing the experience of an English teacher visiting an African School.

The teacher is telling a story, but not in the way I, an Englishman, would tell it. She is dancing it, singing it, acting it. She tells it with her face, her voice, her whole body. The class is completely caught up in the action: toes and shoulders wriggling in sympathy. There is song involved: the whole class joins in without invitation.

This validates how the interpretation of story varies between cultures. In England some represent story literally, by sitting down and reading a book. In this African school, they allowed their whole bodies to capture stories and encouraged class and individual involvement, which is considered to be a dynamic difference between cultures.

In other cultures story is also valued for its effect on psychology, in particular, therapy sessions as well as education. Constantino et al (1994, cited in: Valenzuela-Perez et al, 2014:174) developed a therapy for Hispanic refugee children as a method of conveying values, knowledge and skills for children's adaptation. It used tales and stories of heroes of their culture. Here we see story being used as an approach to portray good morals and skills the children may need to deal with everyday life.

Not only has this been effective with Hispanic children, but also with adopted and maltreated children. Hodges et al (2003, Cited in Lundahl et al, 2014:145) implemented story as a tool to extract key narratives from children in care. In his study he compared narrative themes in two groups of children: children adopted at infancy and children adopted in later life. The researchers found significant differences in the narrative themes of children adopted in later life such as avoidance, aggression and injury.

Van Kleeck makes reference to the fact that the way we interact with one another is culturally influenced, therefore, it is only natural that the way we share stories is also culturally influenced, (2003:1). This is a simple thought, yet something that we may neglect to consider when using stories. Even throughout the UK, we will have our own methods of sharing stories that may reflect upon our dialect or culture of our region.

2.4 How do children interact with stories?

Story, as a method of communicating and sharing, is consistent between the past and the present. However the way children interact with stories evolves with technological advances. Kucirkova (2013:115) explains how children particularly enjoy stories on tablet software, thus, expressing the use of technology as one successful and significant method of engagement with story. This is comparable to adults, with the advanced technology such as kindles and other e-book readers. It was believed that many adults would no longer choose to read a traditional book, yet CitizenNews (2015) confirms that recently traditional book sales have increased whilst the number of people buying tablet software has fallen.

Other software has been generated over the past two decades to create and share story ideas; KidPad is one of these innovative products (Hourcade, 2002:500). It encourages children to socialise and work together to develop and adapt stories. This promotes the use of technology and feedback to strengthen children's understanding and use of story.

Children innately use stories outside of the classroom within the wider school environment. The playground is often a great space for sharing stories, narrating play and contributing anecdotes as Grugeon and Gardner (1994:12) highlight through a short transcript of two children on the school playground.

Lucy: I remember, do you remember when we used to play schools with Lyn...

Jess: and we used to play mums and dads.

Lucy: and you were always the mum.

In this excerpt, the children are reminiscing upon the types of games they used to play, yet they are using a narrative by discussing the features of their play demonstrating that children in England have a culturally influenced method for sharing stories. Marsh and Millard (2000:59) reinforce this concept explaining that narration is an instrumental characteristic of playground behaviour for children and that they work collaboratively to share stories based on their culture. The collaboration aspect implies that through narrative and play children can find commonalities that may lead to friendships which without the facilitation of story may not have been established.

Daniel (2012:50) believes that the use of props in storytelling is a common method of engagement with the story. He describes a situation in which a crown was used as a prop to secure the story in the children's memory. He explained the impact this had

upon the children's learning, in terms of creating a familiar reference point for everyone including the story teller themselves. This is sustained by Tsao (2008:518) who lists teaching strategies to enhance reading abilities in young children. Among scaffolding and peer interaction, using props is listed as an effective teaching tool to develop literacy within an early education environment. Dunst et al (2012:4), after conducting a meta-analysis of 11 studies investigating retelling of stories, found that one of the most influential methods of retelling for children is the use of a manipulative such as a story prop. This accounted for 59% of the overall effect size from the 11 studies examined. Haven (2000:69) believes that props are also engaging not only for the audience, but in addition, for the user as well.

Pellowski (1990, Cited in: Grainger, 1997:19) discusses how in Native American history they would create reminiscent drawings in the sand to accompany their tale. This is similar to the way in which children interact with story through the use of illustration and sound. Alexander (2011:5) sustains the same belief in modern society, stating that it is so important to understand that with every new piece of technology invented, we create ways to tell stories through said medium. This is in keeping with modern day strategies such as images in books, a spoken CD to accompany the story or a video on a screen to watch. All of the above assist comprehension of a story and make the spoken word come to life.

Upholding the belief that illustration engages and influences children's story reading, Justice and Lankford (2002:18), after studying children's eye movements when reading books, concluded that 95% of children's visual attention is focussed on the illustrations. Illustration is proven not only influential with young children's story reading but also with adolescent's choice and engagement with story. After studying research on the use of graphic novels, Hammond (2009, Cited in: Griffith, 2010:185)

found that secondary students often use an innovative method of interpreting a graphic story based upon the images used in the books.

2.5 How does the environment facilitate and enhance the use of stories?

Stories can be incorporated into classrooms in a limitless capacity through the imagination of both the educator and the students. Sackett (2012:363) suggests the potential for the use of stories in classrooms. She states that stories have the possibility to lay the foundations for a project as well as providing entertainment during quiet times.

Although this is not the extent to which the facilitation of story in the classroom is possible, Grainger (1997:63-65), lengthens the list of possibilities for stories in the primary classroom. She describes in depth a wide range of creative ideas, one of which is story quilts. This could be constructed for the children or with the children, allowing them a means of visually representing a story.

Grainger further extends the methods of enhancing the use of story by describing the impact of a story mural which facilitates children to piece together different ideas of similar stories and create their own story using features of others. It is comparable to the use of story boards or story mountains in a classroom to encourage children to write a short story. However, a method such as this can stifle the children as they are all following the same repetitive format. Shukla (2005:213) confirms that too much structure in education can limit creativity, impulsiveness and innovation.

Story sacks are a great method to promote children's learning through enhancing the play environment. Boswell (2011:1) describes a case study conducted at her nursery in Surrey. The children were given story sacks to take home and use with their

families. The feedback they received from families was extremely positive, commenting on how it had encouraged the children to expand their learning into other areas such as counting, geography and types of animals, which reveals how enticing story can be to children when adults correctly and sufficiently develop the environment.

Providing a space for children to use story through the medium of drama is another enhancement often utilised in the classroom. Sun (2003:2) believes drama encourages children to recreate and relive their experiences of story in a method that they are confident and comfortable with. It is their interpretation of the story so there is no definitive answer. Validating this, Adomat (2009:629), points out that using drama to contextualise a story provides many possibilities for the child to understand meanings conveyed through the story. It also allows others the ability to take on different perspectives and understand from someone else's view point. Barter & Tregidga (2014:7) elaborate on this when discussing how Simons (2014) retells the traditional story of Little Red Riding Hood. The tale is told from the wolf's perspective, inspiring and motivating the children to understand the story from a different view point and in turn be able to identify with different characters.

2.6 Story in the curriculum

We have discovered that stories play a pivotal role in the UK and other countries throughout the education system. However, what is it that makes stories so attractive in education? And does the relevant curriculum literature understand the importance of story?

Smorgozewska (2014:23) states that reading to children encourages development of literacy in terms of vocabulary, but also advances imagination, which indicates that

story has a large impact on children's language and communication skills. To affirm this belief Snow et al (1988, Cited in: Justice & Pence, 2005:28) state that reading stories provides a means by which children can develop their communicative language and literacy abilities by extending their vocabulary and improving phonological awareness. Saracho (2012:194) also makes reference that through the use of story children also become familiar with story structure and grammar enabling them to retell stories and write stories with ease because they are aware of the necessary literary features.

In 2004, the Ofsted report: Reading for Pleasure and Purpose highlighted an issue of reading within education

Although schools were successfully raising reading attainment and were teaching pupils the skills they need to read with accuracy and understanding, few were successfully engaging with it.

Here, I consider that the term 'engaging' infers that schools were not being creative or imaginative in the way they encompassed reading. If children read, they should enjoy it and want to read on, not become detached and lose interest otherwise the educational benefits of story become non-existent. A study by Clark (2011, Cited in DfES, 2012:4) shows the percentages of children who enjoy reading. They found that 61 % of children stated that they enjoyed reading very much or quite a lot. This is a statistic which suggests that the majority of children studied already enjoyed reading as a hobby; therefore the curriculum should engage children further and hopefully see this statistic rising in coming years.

After the Rose (2006) review, reading was one of the main areas to 'tackle' in terms of education. Phonics as a method of learning to read was enforced as the core

focus. This drive on improving reading in schools has created an extremely valued presence for stories and their educational benefits.

Feng et al (2014) conducted a study of bilingual and monolingual children in their home environment. After analysing the data gained from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Birth Cohort (ECL-B), their results concluded that reading books within the early years is one of the most influential factors in determining literacy and language ability even after controlling factors such as the parent's education history and social status. This consequently, highlighted reading as one of the most compelling elements in determining later educational success. This theory is sustained by Clark and Rumbold (2006.Cited in DfES, 2012:9) who identified several benefits of reading, some of these being in areas of reading and writing attainment and text comprehension and grammar.

Currently, in primary curriculum documentation, story is clearly identified throughout, for example, in the Development Matters documentation story is referenced in the following sections: communication and language, personal social and emotional development and literacy.“Use puppets and other props to encourage listening and responding when singing a familiar song or reading from a story book,” (Early Education, 2012:15).This quote not only suggests that story is beneficial it gives examples of how story can be used in the EYFS to maximise its potential.

During the entire key stages one and two documentation (DfES, 2014), story is only mentioned four times, which insinuates that the new national curriculum is devaluing the importance of story unlike the EYFS documentation and guidance. Nonetheless, in the purpose of study for English, (2014:4) it states “through reading in particular, pupils have a chance to develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and

spiritually,” This clear link between reading and holistic development of the child creates a greater need for the use of stories in the primary curriculum.

Over four decades ago, the importance of language in the curriculum was identified:

The Bullock Report (1975) were studied afresh, particularly it’s three salient messages discussed in chapter 12: that language crosses the curriculum, that every teacher is therefore a language teacher and that every school should have a language policy (Cited in Garvie, 1990: 11).

Even though this discusses language in the curriculum and not explicitly story in the curriculum, the same principles still apply. Story is a vehicle for developing language and the quote makes reference to language crossing the curriculum which story also does. Story not only aids language development it can also aid creativity and imagination which can link to many other areas of the curriculum such as Music, PE, Art and Design. Education Business (2014) sustains this belief when discussing the benefits of stories. They believe it allows children to learn real-world skills and discover their inner imagination and creativity.

The Every Child a Talker initiative is one rooted in strong curriculum beliefs that accordingly strengthens the use of stories in schools. Craigs (n.d.:1) discusses the approach to storytelling by giving children more creative responsibility in designing and using their own methods of communication through story. This belief is supported by Moyles (2014: 256) explaining how children benefit from both talking about and listening to stories, describing how children create a rich mental model of the text when they listen to a story.

In contrast, there have been arguments that specify that storybook reading and storytelling in primary classrooms have no effects on children’s language and communication skills in later life, thus reducing the importance and value of stories in

education. Scarborough and Dobrich (1994 Cited in Ezell & Justice, 2005:11) argued that the credibility given to story reading may not be as influential in developing language and communication as historically believed.

Supporting this belief, Kahn et al (2014:950) conclude that even though there is considerable evidence justifying the development of stories on academic and cognitive skills, only restricted advancements have been made in appreciating how these new narrative skills can be implemented into the curriculum.

Both of these arguments speak less favourably of a place for stories in the curriculum, making us question what we have believed for decades about the importance of story. Nevertheless, Kahn (2014:950) still makes reference to the fact that stories are proven to enhance and advance academic and cognitive ability.

My own study will contribute to the previous research and literature surrounding the use of stories within primary education. I aim to point out the most influential and significant methods that children use to interact with stories. It may have implications upon practice by encouraging professionals to readily incorporate enhancements within their practice.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to understand how environments stimulate and aid incorporation of stories in the classroom also how children choose to interact with them. Previous literature in this area demonstrates many creative and innovative approaches to using story in the classroom. Despite this, there are still some, such as Scarborough and Dobrich (1994. Cited in: Ezell & Justice, 2005:11), who consider the association between stories and primary education to be rather feeble.

Therefore my specific research questions for this study were:

- How do children interact and engage with story?
- How does the environment facilitate and enhance the use of story?

3.2 Data Collection

I used qualitative data in my research because I wished to truly understand the phenomena of stories in schools and intensely studied how children interacted with those stories. This was in the form of qualitative data as I did not desire to establish cause and effect relationships such as those associated with quantitative research.

Merriam (2009:5) encapsulates this:

Rather than determining cause and effect, predicting or describing the distribution of some attribute... [qualitative] researchers may be interested in uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon...by understanding how people interpret their experiences.

I preferred to gain rich detail through qualitative methods about how stories were used in the primary classroom rather than, for example, gaining a statistic such as how many children used stories. Additionally, qualitative research generally leads to

the collection of 'soft data' such as words, sentences and photos which can provide a more comprehensive insight into the use of stories in Education (Neuman, 2014:167).

After deciding to gather qualitative data, I then chose which data collection method to use. I opted to employ the method of observations. This was an interpretive method that aimed to discover people's opinions, values and beliefs, (Leeds Beckett University, 2014).

Participant observation was the desired method of research in this study due to its numerous benefits in regards to improving the validity of the study. By being in the same environment as the children I was observing, it allowed me to directly see how they engaged with stories, rather than being told how they engaged with stories, for example, through the interview method.

Participant observation allowed me to get a detailed insight into children's engagement with stories as I spent "sufficient time with the group or in the situation, to gain much deeper, richer and more accurate information," (Kumar, 2011:129). The terms 'deeper', 'richer' and 'more accurate' establish that without being in such close proximity of the environment you are observing, it is not possible to gain such realistic data.

The sample I used in my research was convenient and purposeful. Both of the settings were convenient as they were located within a short distance from one another. They were also purposeful as I had been visiting the settings on a regular basis, creating fewer barriers to obstruct the research in terms of validity and reliability. A description of the schools and settings used are as follows:

- A small urban infant school in an isolated, deprived neighbourhood consisting of approximately 100 pupils aged between 3 and 7.
- An urban junior and infant school located in an equally deprived neighbourhood consisting of approximately 300 pupils aged between 3 and 11.

3.3 Advantages of Participant Observation

Observational methods of data collection provided a direct approach to gaining the necessary information. For this reason, it allowed direct access to the social phenomena being discussed, in this case the use of stories. Yet, Polkinghorne (1983:128) states “while observations may continually grow in accuracy, the inductive inferences made from the observations are open to error.” As a result of using a direct approach, this could have created other significant issues such as complications in deducing the suggestions that were created from observing behaviour, however, this was not the case in this study.

Another advantage was the flexibility that observations offered to myself as a researcher. Observations can take varied methods from unstructured approaches to structured, standardised measures (University of Strathclyde, n.d). I chose to take an unstructured approach which allowed for more realistic, true world findings to be recorded. In a structured observation the researchers decide, prior to the study commencing, the behaviours and categories to observe (French, 1993:141, Cited in: Sim & Wright, 2000:81). If I had applied this approach it would have prevented me from discovering any unplanned and unanticipated outcomes in the study.

3.4 Limitations of Participant Observation

Qualitative research methods, in particular observations, often lack the rigour that can frequently be found in experimental studies such as those that produce quantitative data. This refers to the lack of control over variables which can be manipulated in scientific, quantitative research, as control is a key element that the foundations of knowledge and understanding in psychology are built on. (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2011:270).

The lack of control could have prevented the findings from being generalised to other schools and settings, therefore making the data unrepresentative of the wider school population. As mentioned by Laursen et al (2012:158), my study could have been strengthened by conducting the research with a larger sample of settings from different cultural and geographical backgrounds. This was not practical within my given time frame for this piece of research, yet will be taken into consideration for subsequent research studies.

An additional issue that could have been generated was the objectivity of the research. When one person conducts observations and draws conclusions from the recorded data, it is easy for them to add their own subjective thoughts and beliefs to the data. This may be because the researcher inadvertently records what they want to happen rather than what really happened. This is an issue highlighted by Lien et al (2012:190),

In other words, the first problem is about whether the reflection of the researcher can be rational, and the second problem is whether the reflection of the researcher can be objective.

I ensured that whilst writing my observations I stayed impartial and during the observation procedure I did not aid the children in any way to influence their behaviour. This leads onto my next potential weakness involving my presence within the observations.

It is believed that because of a researcher's presence in the school settings, it can negatively affect and influence children's behaviour. This is known as the Hawthorne Effect. The term was originally coined by Henry Landsberger to define the short term improvement in behaviour due to being observed (Khurana, 2009:139). It would have impacted upon the research as the behaviour being observed would not be natural nor realistic. However, I discuss in the next section on validity how I ensured that this was not the case.

3.5 Validity & Reliability

“Procedures that improve reliability often come at the expense of a loss of validity.” (Mashburn et al, 2014:403) Although in research the aim is to make studies as reliable and valid as possible, Mashburn points out here that what we wish to do in research and what we actually do are two separate concepts.

I ensured my research was valid as I measured exactly what I intended to. The use of observations directly measured the occurrence of children's interaction with stories and allowed an insight into how the environment facilitated this.

To improve the validity of my research I wrote rich, thorough descriptions giving detail of what was happening during the observation and any background

information that was necessary for contextualising the data. I aimed to give enough detail so that the reader felt as though they were involved first hand in the observation.

An issue highlighted earlier about observer effect is one that could have threatened the validity and reliability of my research. McKinnon (1998:37) states that “a common criticism of the field study method is that the researchers’ presence in the setting will cause the participants to change their behaviour and conversations,”

Although, Creswell (1998:201-203) states that through ‘prolonged engagement’ it can eradicate this very threat to validity and reliability. Both of the schools I used for my research, I had been visiting for the previous twelve months; therefore, I was already a well-known presence at the schools to both staff and students. I also visited each school at least once per week so the children became more familiar in my company and I was able to develop a level of trust and respect from the students. This ensured that no observer effect took place in my observations as the children did not see me as an observer, only another adult to help within the setting.

In terms of reliability, I ensured the duration of my observations were consistent and of substantial length as “shorter observations could also reduce accuracy and reliability” (Ho & Kane, 2013:6). The reliability of my study was further improved as I conducted my observations at different times throughout the school day, which enabled me to gain a realistic view of the interactions. If I had always observed the children in the morning the findings may be different to those observations conducted in the afternoon. By alternating this, I removed this barrier to reliability.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In any research project involving human participants, serious ethical considerations must be taken into account. Leeds Beckett University had already approved of my proposal, prior to conducting any research. Therefore, they had already agreed I had acknowledged and outlined various ethical issues which I may encounter and that I had thought about necessary actions to preventing them.

Before any research took place, informed consent was given to observe all participants. This means they had been given background information on my research and what I intended to do with my findings. In regard to my study, consent had been given to observe all participants from the schools and the schools had informed parents and children of this, consequently giving them the opportunity to remove themselves if they wished, however, this was not the case. The settings used were also made aware they had the right to withdraw at any point during the research, which would have then subsequently led to the collected data being destroyed and discarded.

A further ethical issue I had to address was the anonymity and confidentiality of participants in my study. "Anonymity is one of the core principles of research ethics and is usually regarded as the mechanism through which privacy and confidentiality are maintained." (Vainio, 2012:685). If I ensured the participants and their families, that were involved in my research, were kept anonymous, I subsequently ensured their right to live privately and confidentially. The way in which I addressed this issue of ethics was by using pseudonyms. I changed any names used in my research to false names, guaranteeing my participants cannot be traced in anyway.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

In terms of data collection I used a qualitative approach so I also wanted to use qualitative strategies in the area of data analysis. I decided to use textual analysis and follow grounded theory as a method to analyse the observations I had recorded. The main focus of the approach is where “categories and coding play central roles” (Corbin & Strauss, 1998:22).

The three types of coding used in grounded theory are open, axial and selective coding. By using grounded theory, I used the data to generate my themes rather than having a preconceived idea of the themes I wished to find.

When I began to analyse my data I used open coding, for this I created a general list of themes that appeared throughout the observations and gave each a preliminary label to explain that particular concept.

As I arrived at the second level of coding, I was able to focus predominantly on the codes I had already created and examined them in more detail to find out if they could be further divided into sub categories (Neuman, 2014: 481). For example, I initially created a category with the label ‘physical aid to story’. After additional analysis of the data, I realised that this category was too broad and an extra division of the category could occur. This was then separated into ‘use of props’ and ‘use of cue at the time of storytelling’.

The final stage of coding was selective coding in which I chose a core category that was “systematically relating all other categories to that core category” (Kuckartz, 2014:25). The core category I observed was the ‘use of props’ as this was consistent

throughout all observations and had connections to other categories which were created.

The following chapter outlines the findings generated from the conducted observations. I will then go on to discuss the findings relating to relevant literature in chapter two. This will aid in supporting and strengthening my study.

4. Findings from Research

This section discloses the results from the data collected through the method of participant observations (as mentioned in section 3) and will analyse this with the use of previous literature in the field, as mentioned in section 2.

4.1 How do children interact and engage with story?

One of the aims of this research was to find a variety of diverse approaches that children use when they interact with stories. Yet, when conducting the research, it became rather apparent that most children have a consistent method of interacting and engaging with a story, regardless of the context or the setting. This was an unexpected encounter as I had believed, prior to this research, that all children interact and react to story in a variety of methods that reflects their cultural upbringing. Reviewing my data several times in order to create specific coded categories allowed me to distinguish the similarities and differences between observations thus enabling me to realise that there were far more similarities than there were differences.

The main theme that was discovered was the 'use of a prop' (see Appendix). In all observations, this theme is extremely evident. Not only was it a method of engagement, but also a method of facilitating story as the props had to be provided within the environment for the children to interact with them. Other themes were also consistent through most of the observations; although, the storytelling and sharing were not solely based around these themes as it was with 'use of a prop'. Other themes observed were:

- Familiarity with the story

- Collaborative storytelling
- Use of cues to retell story

4.1.1 Use of Props

As mentioned above, the use of props in the storytelling procedure was prevalent across all children observed. A prop can be described as an enhancement to a dramatisation of a story that can give clues about impending events (Huff, 2002).

Upon analysing the data, I observed this use as a method of transportation from the real world to the imaginary world. In observation three, Amanda herself dressed using a prop to become 'the big bad wolf' and in turn felt empowered to change her demeanour to suit that of the wolf. She demonstrated this by chasing 'the three bears and pretended to eat them'. This is illustrated in Simons' (2014) explanation about children using costumes and role play such as this to understand the world from other people's perspectives. Amanda, in observation three, began to retell her story from the perspective of the wolf, allowing for a different view point from the other characters involved. Haven (2000:69), as mentioned in the previous review of literature, believes that props during story telling can encourage the engagement of the audience, helping them to follow the story. This is apparent in observation one where a child used both the book and actions to keep the other children interested.

In other observations, such as observation one and two, the children used the prop differently. In these examples the children did not become a character from the story; instead they took on the role of teacher by using a book to read to the other children, learning about new concepts. The children had observed and studied the teacher's behaviour in this situation and modelled their own behaviour upon this, Highscope (n.d.: 72) describes this as children using what they see and hear around them as

their own form of role play through imitation. Highscope believe that imitation should be nurtured in young children through the facilitation of opportunities such as those described in the observations. The imitation was nurtured in both settings as children were encouraged and provided with the necessary resources to become who they want to be.

4.1.2 Familiarity with the story

Throughout the observations, children structured their play surrounding a story that was well-known to them. This enabled the children to feel confident when interacting with the story. In observation two, it describes Lucy remembering specific phrases the teacher had used when she told the story, which made Lucy confident in her own ability at retelling the story to her peers. As previously discussed in the literature review, Saracho (2012:194) explains that reading and listening to a story regularly enables children to become familiar with not only the story itself but also the structure and sequence of events associated with that story. Lucy used this technique alongside the next theme that will be discussed: the use of cues to retell the story. Berkowitz (2011:37) also maintains that children engage more readily with a familiar story. She declares that this is because it enables them to feel confident and secure whilst encouraging active participation from the audience as they can anticipate what is going to happen next. This was apparent in observation one because Lucy expected the other children, her audience, to join in with actions and phrases she knew that they were aware of.

4.1.3 Use of cues to retell story

In each observation across both settings the children used a cue to help them when they were involved in telling their story. The most common method of this, evident in

half of the observations was the use of the original story at the time of retelling. These children had the book present at the time of storytelling and used it to guide themselves through using the pictures to help sequence the events and describe what was happening when the children could not read the words. This supports Justice and Lankford's (2002:18) belief that the majority of children's attention is directed towards the pictures and illustrations used in a story when reading. Also, Follmer Greenhoot et al (2014:2) found after analysing interactions with children's story reading (both with and without illustrations), that more children in the illustration group recalled more key events from the story than those in the non-illustration group. Therefore, using pictures is a common and proven method of interacting and engaging with story.

Another cue that the children were observed using was a small toy to re-enact the story with. This was a prop that the children chose during the storytelling procedure, but within the context of the observations the children used it to help them retell the story by physically acting it out. In observation four, Sharon used a small world character to walk through the story trays to help her retell the story of 'we're going on a bear hunt'. If Sharon had not used the toy she may have disengaged with the activity sooner as she was motivated to tell the story by portraying the character she was holding. The same theme emerged in observations five and six also. Referring to supporting literature, Dunst et al (2012:4) concluded that one of the most influential methods of retelling for children is the use of a manipulative such as a story prop. This accounted for 59% of the overall effect size from the 11 studies in the meta-analysis. Stadler and Ward (2010:182) also found that the use of a manipulative at the time of retelling encouraged richer descriptions of story features, such as extended noun phrases, during their experimental study of forty two children

in early years classrooms. This shows that manipulatives not only have an influence on engaging children in story retell but it also encourages language development and the use of literacy features of stories.

4.1.4 Collaborative storytelling

In several of the observations, children were working and playing alongside others in a group to retell their story. Again Saracho (2012:153) explains this is a feature of socio-dramatic play with young children in which fantasy and collaboration instinctively occur. In the observations I conducted it was apparent that all children had a shared interest in the story and they all worked together co-operatively to achieve a common goal which was using pretend play to encapsulate the story. Strengthening Saracho's belief, Kara et al (2013:29), as suggested previously, believes that peer collaboration in storytelling is vital to not only develop necessary social skills but also to develop the use of language and to generate immediate feedback from other children, hence, collaborative storytelling being a very attractive method of engaging with story for young children.

Peer Collaboration can also be evident through using technology. Story software has been developed that encourages the use of collaboration and sharing with others. KidPad, mentioned in the literature review, is software that allows children to generate story ideas through drawing or writing story scenes which can then be shared and adapted by others. Since the introduction of KidPad it has also been found to be used as virtual game software amongst users to draw and guess the pictures, a game which is known as scribble wars (Hourcade et al, 2002:500).

4.2 How does the environment facilitate and enhance the use of story?

Through my observations it is clear that the environment can enhance the use of story in a variety of forms. Some of the enhancements to the environment are also methods of engagement for children, for example, through the use of props. These are provided in the environment by the educator to allow for dramatic play and storytelling, yet they are also a method children readily choose when reading or telling a story.

The main means of enhancing the environment that were observed were:

- Presence of an adult/Child initiated activity
- Use of props
- Recording of story

4.2.1 Presence of an adult during storytelling

In most of the observations the children initiated their story reading activity themselves because it is part of their play experience in which they are exploring and discovering first hand. The teacher led enhancements that were provided in the environment complemented and scaffolded the child initiated storytelling by inspiring curiosity and imagination. Korn-Bursztyn (2012:127) explains how this collaborative learning from teacher and child is an integral part of classroom life in which both parties play the roles of initiator and responder. Using Davidson's (1996, Cited in: Bredekamp, 2004:24) definitions of the roles adults take during play, the adult in this scenario takes on the role of 'stage manager' ensuring the necessary resources are supplied in order to best support play.

Craigs (n.d:1) supports this belief of a combination of adult led and child led experiences with story as she describes the Every Child a Talker initiative. She explains that the ECAT programme has taken a new approach to storytelling, believing it should be a culmination of both styles of interaction in order to create maximum potential for the child. This may be because without the adult to support and scaffold, children may not reach their full prospects. The presence of adults in the environment leads on to my next enhancement being methods of recording the use of story.

4.2.2 Recording of story

In some of the observations, as mentioned above, an adult was present at the time of storytelling. This was not to initiate an activity nor was it to alter the children's play. It was to enhance the story telling experience through recording the story for the children to relive retrospectively. Frost, Wortham and Reifel (2001) conducted a study on adult involvement in child's play. They found that when adults become too immersed in play the child tends to lose interest as this is not the direction they wanted to take their play. The adults in my observations were very aware of this and used themselves strategically to enhance the environment for children and their story book experiences.

A further method of recording used in observation five, was the use of an adult to scribe the story that the child spoke. Referring back to Davidson's (1996, Cited in Bredekamp, 2004:24) definitions of the role of an adult in children's play, the Scribe would collate drawings and readings from the children and use this to further scaffold the environment giving resources best suited to their needs, but also to communicate to other adults what the child is learning through their play.

4.2.3 Use of props

Referring to previous findings, the use of props played a vital role in the facilitation and engagement of story. The environment was enhanced through the use of manipulatives such as story props. The educator could observe the children playing and choose sufficient resources to further extend their play.

Story sacks are one example of adults providing resources to scaffold story book learning. As considered in chapter two, a study conducted by Surrey Council where parents gave feedback on their views of story sacks illustrate this. One particular parent commented that it not only engaged their child with the story, but it also encouraged and allowed them to learn more about the animals mentioned in the story (Boswell,2011:1). Consequently, this child's learning was extended by creating cross curricular links through the use of story.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the methods children acquire of engaging with stories and how the environment and the educator can help to shape this. I have established that one consistent and successful method is through the use of a manipulative such as a prop. The schools studied for this research were innovative and visionary with their enhancements and knew how to correctly provide for the children in their care.

5.1 Implications for practice

Although this has only been a small scale study, the important concepts that are highlighted have been addressed by other researchers previously, such as Daniel, Sackett and Tsao. Therefore, this research has focused on the main themes that emerged from children's storytelling and will allow educators to reflect upon their own practice and decide what provision they may want to offer to permit the limitless possibilities discussed throughout this study.

The findings from this study and other previous literature on the topic may challenge people's perspectives on the importance of story and story play within the curriculum. In turn this could encourage story reading, telling and sharing to be used more readily within the school day and freely within the classroom.

6. Personal Reflection

I believe that participant observations allowed the children to behave in a consistent and standard manner, providing accurate and genuine findings. By observing children through a range of ages it allowed me to understand story usage through the entire primary age range, rather than specifically to one year group. For this reason, the validity of my study was improved.

If I were to conduct this study again I would ensure I used a larger sample size to guarantee that the findings would be more realistic of the general population. This would have allowed me to generalise my findings further than the sample itself.

I would also be interested in observing one group of children at regular intervals throughout the school year to see if the findings differed with age when studying the same children as this would allow practitioners to provide specific story resources at each age group.

As an additional improvement to my study, I may also contemplate using a further research method as triangulation to strengthen and support my findings. I could do this by interviewing teachers and gaining their perspectives on children's stories and these could be contrasted and correlated with the observations already collected.

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Appendix – Observations

Observation One

School A

Lucy was sat in the reading corner on the teacher’s chair; three other children were sat on the carpet in front of the chair listening. Lucy began to read the Little Red Hen story using the book; this story was familiar to all children in the class as they previously used this story to create their own memory story using actions. Lucy could not read the words from the book herself, but remembered the actions they had used in the memory story. The actions are using some of Pie Corbett’s ‘talk for writing’ actions. Lucy used the pictures in the story book to aid her reading. “Not I said the cat, not I said the dog, not I said the rat...well I’ll do it myself!” Lucy exclaimed. She encouraged the children to join in on this line that is repeated numerous times throughout the story. Lucy also kept reminding the children to join in with the actions throughout the story.

Presence of an adult	Yellow
Familiarity with story	Blue
Collaborative storytelling	Green
Recording of the story	Orange
Use of cues to retell story	Red
Props used	Purple
Teacher led activity	Teal
Child led/initiated activity	Dark Blue

Observation Two

School A

Lucy asked the teacher if she would be able to read a story today during carpet time rather than the teacher read the story. She chose to read a large picture story book to the other children called 'Dogger'. This was a story that had been read to the children the day prior. Lucy had remembered this and looked very confident stood at the front of the class preparing to retell the story. Lucy asked if she could be filmed so she could watch it back, the staff at the school were more than happy to do this. Lucy remembered the order of events in the story and used the pictures as reminders and cues. She completed the entire story, even remembering specific language used by the teacher the previous day. "Joe was chewing his toy because his teeth are growing," Lucy remembered the teacher explaining what the baby was doing in the picture and she too told the children what was happening in the picture.

Presence of an adult	Yellow
Familiarity with story	Blue
Collaborative storytelling	Green
Recording of the story	Orange
Use of cues to retell story	Red
Props used	Purple
Teacher led activity	Teal
Child led/initiated activity	Dark Blue

Observation Three

School A

Amanda and three friends were playing in the role play area of the classroom.

Currently, this is displayed as a forest with a mural on one wall, netting above the carpet and lots of leaves and trees presented around the area. Amanda gave three masks to the other children, these were masks of bears. She said “let’s sing the goldilocks song, I will be goldilocks and you can be the three bears!” All children began to sing the song together whilst parading around the carpet. This song also had actions to it.

“Goldilocks went to the house of the bears, oh what did her blue eyes see, a bowl that was huge and a bowl that was small and a bowl that was tiny and that was all, she counted them 1...2...3...” This verse repeated for chairs, beds and then finally bears. After the final verse Amanda then added a twist to the story/game by involving a big bad wolf. She put on the wolf hat and chased the three bears pretending to eat them. Here Amanda incorporated two traditional tales together.

Presence of an adult	Yellow
Familiarity with story	Blue
Collaborative storytelling	Light Green
Recording of the story	Orange
Use of cues to retell story	Red
Props used	Purple
Teacher led activity	Teal
Child led/initiated activity	Dark Blue

Observation Four

School B

Sharon was playing at the story tray table. This is a table set up for children to be able to retell a story using the props available, each half term the story tray changes.

Currently, the story tray is 'we're going on a bear hunt' a story that is loved by the whole class. There are six trays, one for each of the events that the family encounter

e.g. thick oozy mud (soil), long wavy grass (green shredded paper and artificial grass), deep dark forest (green shredded paper and trees), swirling whirling storm (glitter snow), deep cold river (blue shredded paper of different textures) and dark gloomy cave (a cave created from cardboard). There are also bears, the story book,

pens and paper at this table. Sharon had one person in her hand she said "we're going on a bear hunt, we're gonna catch a big one, were not scared, what a beautiful

day!" With one hand she began moving her character through the trays to tell the story. With her other hand she began to do the actions that Michael Rosen uses when performing this story. Some other children came to join Sharon at the table so

by the end of the story the whole family were there rather than just one character.

Presence of an adult	Yellow
Familiarity with story	Blue
Collaborative storytelling	Light Green
Recording of the story	Orange
Use of cues to retell story	Red
Props used	Purple
Teacher led activity	Teal
Child led/initiated activity	Dark Blue

Observation Five

School B

Matilda wanted to retell the story of Little Red Riding Hood. She asked the teacher how she could write down the story because she didn't know how to spell a lot of the words. The teacher offered a great suggestion; that she would write the words down that Matilda spoke about the story. Matilda was very excited about this idea and ran to the small world area to pick up a character. She herself had put a red cape on from the role play area so she could embody the character. She began to dictate to the teacher the story she wanted recording. She remembered the order of events as she moved her character across the table. She used language such as 'raced' and 'gobbled' which are used in the traditional story. She also remembered famous lines from the story which she asked to be used such as

"What sharp teeth you have?"

"All the better to eat you with!"

Presence of an adult	Yellow
Familiarity with story	Blue
Collaborative storytelling	Green
Recording of the story	Orange
Use of cues to retell story	Red
Props used	Purple
Teacher led activity	Teal
Child led/initiated activity	Dark Blue

Observation Six

School B

Jamie was sat in the home corner with his favourite book about dinosaurs. The book was upside down. He had heard the book being read to a small group of children yesterday and had thoroughly enjoyed listening to the story and joining in on the parts where all the dinosaurs roared. He held in one hand a dinosaur toy from the small world area. Jamie used the pictures to remember the sequence of events in the story. He walked the toy dinosaur across the pages of the book as if it was involved in the story. Jamie remembered the roaring parts and would shout it as loud as he possibly could. An adult filmed Jamie reading on an ipad.

Presence of an adult	Yellow
Familiarity with story	Blue
Collaborative storytelling	Green
Recording of the story	Orange
Use of cues to retell story	Red
Props used	Purple
Teacher led activity	Teal
Child led/initiated activity	Dark Blue