

**The Role of Oral Storytelling in the Development of Narrative Competence,
Confidence and Creativity in Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

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Date of submission: 24 July 2023

Master of Arts in Education Dissertation

Statement of Originality

I certify that all material in this dissertation which is not my own work has been identified and that any material that has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University has been acknowledged.

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Date: 19 July 2023

Word Count: 12,738

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my husband and daughter for their patience and support in keeping life at home on track and allowing me to stay focused. Thanks also to my dissertation supervisor whose comments and advice have been invaluable and have supported me to be a reflective and resilient researcher. Final thanks to the participants without whom this study would not have happened.

Abstract

Both researchers and educators recognise the importance of attention to both compositional skills and transcriptional skills in children's early development as writers. Current statutory guidance in England, whilst acknowledging both skills in its outline of areas of learning and development, focuses exclusively on transcriptional skills in defining the expected attainment by the end of the early years foundation stage. The aim of this study was to investigate the role of oral storytelling in the development of children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity. The study took place over a four-week period and involved the two teachers and a sample group of eight children from two primary school reception classes. A mixed methods approach was taken with quantitative methods gathering data around the inclusion of story conventions, story event structure and use of connectives in children's oral stories and qualitative methods gathering teacher perceptions via semi-structured interviews. The findings from this study demonstrated the importance of teacher modelling of the storytelling process, the necessity for structures and resources to develop children's understanding of and confidence in building coherent and cohesive stories orally and the impact that planned opportunities for composing stories orally have on children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Narrative, used in imaginary play and storytelling, is an important part of early childhood; it is the way that young children make sense of the world around them (Cremin & Flewitt, 2017; Myhill et al., 2022). The role of oral storytelling in supporting understanding, developing the way young children think and enhancing imagination is recognised by theorists (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Hayes (2016) develops this idea further, highlighting the necessity for early years education to focus on creativity (generating ideas), composition (making decisions about content) and confidence as a writer, not simply on the physical and orthographic skills involved. However, many educationalists draw attention to the under-utilisation of oral storytelling in the contemporary classroom (Bruce, 2020; Gerde et al., 2015; Stadler & Ward, 2005).

The purpose of this research, therefore, was to explore the impact of oral storytelling on children's narrative competence (encompassing composition), confidence and creativity. In its simplest form, oral storytelling can be defined as telling a story from memory without the aid of a book or written script (Agosto, 2016). The National Council of Teachers of English (2022) embellishes the definition, defining it as "relating a tale to one or more listeners through voice and gesture" (p.1). Importantly, this definition draws our attention to the social nature of storytelling. In agreement with this, Hibbin (2016) suggests that any definition must reflect the "social, qualitative and stylistic" (p. 54) characteristics of oral storytelling if its complexity is to be captured. She, therefore, defines oral storytelling as "a spoken word narrative form that involves relating a non-scripted story using resources of the imagination" (p. 54) and suggests three important characteristics.

Stories are:

- told to an attentive audience (one or more listeners) over a sustained period of time;
- in the moment and owned by the teller;
- related using the spoken word, employing the qualities of speech vocabulary and non-verbal language such as gesture.

Taking account of the differing aspects identified, oral story telling in this study is defined as *relating a non-scripted story to one or more listeners through voice and gesture, using the imagination.*

This study adopted a mixed methods approach to gather both quantitative and qualitative data so that evidence in children's oral stories could be correlated with teacher's perceptions to provide a fuller picture and better understanding of the research subject.

Exploring children's stories in detail would allow a clear and focused exploration of the impact of oral storytelling on the development of children's narrative competence within clearly defined areas. Adding to this, gathering teacher's perceptions of the same aspect aimed to create a more valid picture whilst also giving valuable information relating to confidence and creativity.

The importance of developing both compositional and transcriptional aspects of writing has been repeatedly highlighted in research around supporting the development of early writers (Daffern & MacKenzie, 2015; Kellog et al., 2013; Smith, 1992; Young & Ferguson, 2021). Despite this, assessment at the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) phase of education focuses exclusively on transcriptional aspects. The Early Learning Goal (ELG) for writing states that children working at the expected level of development will:

- write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed;
- spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters;
- write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others.

(Department for Education (DFE), 2021b, p. 13)

Each of the bullet points above represents transcriptional skills only. Therefore, this study is significant in its potential to provide information about the importance of developing compositional skills that may inform the need to review the ELG to reflect a balance between composition and transcription.

As a mother of summer born children and a previous teacher within EYFS, I believe this study is important in its potential to recognise the compositional ability of children who, due to their age and stage of development, may lack the requisite fine and gross motor skills for transcription to successfully show their writing ability against the current ELG for writing. The failure to acknowledge a child's oral compositional skills risks underestimating a child's potential as a writer (Bloodgood, 2002). Therefore, this study aims to provide important findings to inform both future policy and classroom practice. The study took place in one primary school in England over a four-week period and therefore, due to the scale of the study, the findings are not generalisable. Nonetheless, they provide an important insight into the need to consider the subject at both local and national level.

In seeking to clearly fulfil my aims, the chapters in this dissertation are:

- Chapter 2 - a focused review of the literature associated with the aims for this study and leading to my research questions;

- Chapter 3 - an outline of the research design;
- Chapter 4 - the findings of the research study;
- Chapter 5 - a discussion of the findings in relation to existing literature and my research questions;
- Chapter 6 – a summary of conclusions from the research findings and an outline of resulting implications and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction

To identify literature specific to the topic of oral storytelling in relation to children's narrative competence, my initial searches focused on the terms "oral composition", "early writing", "oral storytelling" and "oral story invention". Whilst searching different combinations of these terms via the University of Exeter's library databases yielded a wide variety of literature, it became clear that there were some important contributions that focused on transcriptional skills as well as compositional skills. MacArthur and Graham (2015) define transcription as "transcribing the words the writer wants to say into written symbols on the page" (p. 31). My research area of interest lies in the development of oral narrative competence rather than the development of transcriptional skills. In the EYFS phase of education, children's transcriptional skills are often very limited compared to their oral compositional skills (Kellog et al. 2013). However, in an initial, surface review of the literature, it became apparent that, in seeking to understand what has been written about oral storytelling and its importance in early writing skills (specifically, the development of oral narrative competence), a deeper review of both composition and transcription in early writing development was necessary in order to explore what has been written about the balance between composition and transcription in the teaching of early writing. Therefore, with reference to the EYFS phase, this review of literature will explore the themes of: composition and transcription as core components in the development of writing, the importance of oral storytelling in relation to writing, the impact of storytelling through play, developing creativity in writing and the role of adults in supporting oral storytelling.

Composition and transcription as core components in the development of writing

In thinking specifically about compositional and transcriptional aspects of the writing process, it is important to consider some of the ideologies and beliefs around writing that have the potential to influence EYFS classroom pedagogy (Young & Ferguson, 2021). Two specific, and contrasting, approaches to the early teaching of writing will be considered in order to explore what has been written about the balance of composition and transcription in the teaching of writing – the presentational approach (which prioritises transcription) and the naturalistic approach (which prioritises composition).

The presentational approach

This approach adopts a largely cognitive developmental perspective to the teaching of writing, with transcriptional skills privileged over compositional skills (Kellog, 2008). Gardner (2018) uses the term "the compliant scribe approach" (p. 12) where children

must develop mastery over complex, cognitive skills in order to produce accurate writing. Priority, therefore, is the teaching of transcriptional aspects such as correct spelling, handwriting, punctuation and grammar use. Writing is seen as a set of rules and processes with the author's intent and effect on the reader viewed as less important than accuracy (Young & Ferguson, 2021). By its very nature, this is a teacher-centred approach with "the teacher as gatekeeper and controller of knowledge, cognition and skill" (Young & Ferguson, 2021, p. 2). It seems possible with this approach, therefore, that whilst young children may spend a good amount of time writing, they may have very little engagement early on in their development as writers with composing and therefore potentially fail to recognise their own writerly voice (Lipson et al., 2000).

The naturalistic approach

In contrast, the naturalistic approach to writing gives full agency to the child as the writer, with writing purpose and context being determined by the child and not the teacher. This approach stresses the creative nature of writing with the teacher in role as facilitator of different stimuli for children's own ideas for writing (Hyland, 2021). Time for 'free writing' rather than a focus on developing transcriptional aspects takes priority, with the rationale that writers may not know what they want to write when they begin but form, purpose and audience will emerge during the free writing process (Murray, 1978). Naturalistic development of the writer stresses the role of implicit rather than explicit teaching (Hyland, 2021).

Clearly, these two approaches are opposite in ideology, but it is important to consider the relative strengths and limitations of both. Myhill (2001) comments that "it is all too easy to reduce writing to a set of formulae taught through a series of exercises" (p. 19). Indeed, one could argue that the presentational approach does exactly that and pays minimal attention to the social and collaborative aspects essential for communicating thoughts and ideas to an audience (Gardner, 2018). Eyres (2017) stresses that the lack of acknowledgement of writer identity in the presentational approach is a significant limitation. This is supported by Young and Ferguson (2021) who identify that the intense focus on transcriptional accuracy renders children "only ever spectators and not creators of writing" (p. 4). However, the contrasting lack of attention to the transcriptional skills involved in the crafting of writing seen in the naturalistic approach may be equally limiting since children will need to internalise these basic skills and processes in order to successfully express their thoughts and ideas to others (MacArthur & Graham, 2015). Research demonstrates that the reliance on implicit teaching within the naturalistic approach is insufficient to develop writers who are both thoughtful and successful in conveying their intended message and ideas (Hillocks, 1986; Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007;

Kirschner et al., 2006). Hillocks' (1986) meta-analysis of seventy-three studies showed the practice of explicitly teaching students to incrementally build more complex sentences from simple sentences was highly effective in a large number of the studies. For example, the explicit teaching of accurate sentence combining was found on average to be more than twice as effective as free writing in enhancing the quality of writing. (Combs, 1977; Ney, 1976). In support of this, Graham et al.'s. (2012) meta-analysis showed that text produced by primary age students who were specifically taught the transcriptional aspects of handwriting, typing and spelling (prevalent in the presentational approach) evidenced more improvement in the quality of their writing than that of students not taught these skills. This would appear to support the view that teaching transcriptional skills needs to be part of early writing instruction. However, when Graham et al.'s definition of transcription is considered, it is clear that this also acknowledges writer agency in relation to composition. As previously noted, they state that transcription "involves transcribing the words *the writer wants to say* [emphasis added] into written symbols on the page" (p. 31).

It is clear then, that early writing instruction needs to attend to both transcription and composition. However, as outlined in chapter one, the current ELG for writing pays no attention to the compositional aspects of writing. Equally, the non-statutory curriculum guidance for the EYFS focuses entirely on letter formation, spelling and writing short sentences using a capital letter and full stop, despite acknowledging in the section introduction that "writing involves transcription (spelling and handwriting) and composition (articulating ideas and structuring them in speech, before writing)" (DFE, 2021a, p. 75). This apparent focus on transcription over composition aligns more with the presentational approach to the teaching of writing and perhaps helps us to understand the lack of oral storytelling and story invention in early years classrooms (Bruce, 2020; Gerde et al., 2015; Stadler & Ward, 2005). However, several studies have drawn attention to the need for teachers to achieve a balance between composition and transcription in order to give children "the apprenticeship they need for writing or being a writer" (Young & Ferguson, 2021, p. 177). Both Casey & Hemenway (2001) and Daffern & MacKenzie (2015) state the importance of giving instructional attention to both composition and transcription, maintaining a balance between the two. Furthermore, Daffern & MacKenzie assert that when children discover that they have something to say to a real audience, motivation to compose and transcribe will increase and skills linked to both aspects will improve. Giving children time to simply compose (generate ideas, make decisions on vocabulary choice and develop cohesion) without the pressure to also transcribe should be a key part of supporting early writing development (Cremin, 2010; Genishi & Dyson, 2015; Harmey, 2020; Smith, 1982). Bloodgood (2002) further

draws attention to the risk that an overemphasis on transcriptional elements of writing at the wrong stages of children's development as writers can stifle composition. Hence, this risks impairing the capturing of ideas and the expression of creativity. She states that "if they are to develop confidence, young writers need opportunities to exercise their current knowledge and support to extend it without undue emphasis on correctness" (p. 36). It is, therefore, important to consider the importance of the role played by oral storytelling in the development of composition in early writing.

The importance of oral storytelling

Pinto et al.'s (2016) longitudinal study of the development in narrative competences from oral to written stories in 3–7-year-olds, found oral narrative skills in early childhood to be a predictor of later achievement outcomes in written narrative. Oral narrative competence was, in fact, the only statistically significant predictor of children's competence in demonstrating structure, coherence and cohesion to their stories. Research into improving boys writing (Beattie, 2007; Safford et al., 2004) also supports the importance of oral storytelling in raising attainment, highlighting the role that gratification from the immediacy of the spoken word plays in increasing motivation to write. Pinto et al.'s findings are, perhaps, limited by the use of only one form of stimulus (story) to prompt the oral stories and it would be interesting to see whether their findings would be replicated with other, less scripted, prompts such as images and concrete props. Nonetheless, this study does suggest implications for teaching and the role of the adult which will be picked up later.

Hibbin (2016) equally highlights the role that oral storytelling plays in the development of children's knowledge of the structure and language of story. Unlike Pinto et al., she emphasises the importance of the oral nature of oral storytelling as a valid end point in itself, rather than a precursor to written narrative skills. In contrast, she suggests that linking oral storytelling to written outcomes negatively affects both the process of oral storytelling and the creative quality of the story itself. Committing oral stories to memory is seen as an important development since this allows the stories to be retold and embellished for different listeners on different occasions, thereby supporting awareness of audience and purpose and the need to adapt the story accordingly (Dyson, 2003). The sense of familiarity with what a story can offer is likely only to emerge if children are afforded the opportunity to immerse themselves in a story through regular telling and retelling (Bettelheim, 1991; Gussin-Paley, 2009; Lee, 2016). Imray & Clements' (2020) study of how regular storytelling affected children's play and learning supports the benefits of committing stories to memory. They found that once children had internalised a story into their long-term memory, they then had this story as a resource to adapt and

manipulate in their own oral storytelling. Whilst the storytelling to children in this study was based on printed stories rather than oral stories as previously defined, it offers an interesting possibility for similar outcomes from oral storytelling.

Oral storytelling has an important role to play in the development of both narrative and creative thinking skills as it allows children to develop their thoughts within the pattern of a story (Phillips, 2000). The evidence that children are acquiring narrative and creative thinking skills will often be visible in their play activities and the associated narratives heard in play talk (Agosto, 2016). The importance of verbal creativity in playful spoken language was examined by Wegerif (2005) and was found to be central to “the generation of new links and potential ideas” (p. 230). Creative use of language in oral storytelling is dependent on playful talk (Hibbin, 2016) and, therefore, the role of storytelling through play warrants consideration in the context of early years learning.

Storytelling through play

Play is the primary form of a child’s thinking during the early years (Imray & Clements, 2020; Mercer, 2002) and is the medium they use to create narratives about themselves and the world. Agosto’s (2016) study with 7-8-year-olds in the USA which looked at the literacy benefits of storytelling, showed evidence in children’s play of their use of critical thinking skills following oral storytelling sessions. Observation of children’s play demonstrated the structuring of thoughts in the pattern of a story which was tied together by logical connections. Whilst this provides interesting food for thought, this study was conducted over the period of one day on one isolated occasion and therefore can only be viewed as initial, exploratory work. Furthermore, there was no method for measuring, for example, how much children’s critical thinking skills actually improved as a direct result of the storytelling sessions. Egan (1988) posits the importance of the development of imagination through storytelling, highlighting that it is pretend play that offers children the imaginative space for such development. If we view imagination as the manipulation of what we already know to create something new (Corbett & Strong, 2021), then storytelling becomes a vital part of establishing what is already known. Gussin-Paley (1990) equally views play as storytelling in action and asserts that this makes play and storytelling the “universal learning medium” (p. 4). Gupta’s (2009) New York study of 4–5-year olds’ learning from telling and acting out their own stories demonstrated the opportunity that this afforded for the cognitive, linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, emotional and artistic development of the child. This concurs with Froebel’s (as cited in Aubrey & Riley, 2019) assertion that storytelling in play is an ideal method of educational delivery to support creative expression and imagination as a means of learning. Interestingly, Boden (2001) challenges this notion of creative expression, positing that

play is not necessarily creative in terms of literacy; teachers need to focus on the development of creativity that specifically supports children to be able to manipulate words, ideas and feelings. Creativity as a writer in terms of ideas generation is one of the aspects identified as important for early years education (Hayes, 2016) and is worthy of consideration in this literature review.

Developing creativity in writing

Cremin & Myhill (2012) argue that just about all writing is creative when we place it in the context of the writer using and manipulating language and being inventive and playful. At the heart of creativity is possibility thinking (Craft, 2005) and, in the arena of writing, this is about recognising and using the “infinite possibilities of language” via oral rehearsal (Cremin & Myhill, 2012 p. 23). Boden (2001), however, cautions against seeing creativity as divorced from knowledge and asserts the need to nurture knowledge alongside creativity. This is highly relevant in early writing education since knowledge underpins the choices that children can make about content, structure, combining ideas and creating connections between ideas to aid cohesion. Creativity is “not the same thing as knowledge but it is firmly grounded in it” (Boden, 2001, p. 102).

Several authors draw attention to the need for risk-taking and experimentation in order to foster creativity in writing (Calkin, 2018; Cremin & Myhill, 2012; Grainger et al., 2005; MacKenzie, 2011). Oral composition allows young children to play with ideas and possibilities, and to investigate ways to shape their stories and communicate them to others. In pushing the boundaries of their own use of language, young children may not always get it right in terms of grammatical accuracy. However, Cremin & Myhill (2012) assert that this ‘failure’ is essential if children are to successfully discover “their own writing voices” (p. 23). In line with this, Grainger et al. (2005) highlight the need to foster self-directed learning and agency of the child in order for them to develop a sense of what they are doing as a writer and why. Indeed, Hayes (2016) identifies the importance, for young children, of expressing their ideas and emotions orally before attempting to capture these in transcription to ensure that creativity is not lost. She posits that the more able a child is to orally communicate their ideas, the more easily they will transfer their ideas to paper as transcriptional skills develop. Fisher (2010), whilst agreeing that children need to see writing as more than simply forming letters, spelling words correctly and accurately demarcating sentences, asserts that these secretarial aspects of writing are the most important for beginning writers. This appears to sit alongside the current emphasis on transcription in EYFS statutory guidance in England, as previously outlined. In contrast, Cremin & Myhill (2012) highlight that talk is not only a useful tool for children to express their creativity, it also serves as an oral rehearsal for the linguistic and

structural demands of writing. Calkin (2018) further disputes Fisher's ranking of transcription ahead of composition for beginning writers, stating that if writing is imposed on children in a highly mechanistic way, it can hinder children developing their own ways of representing their world and their experience through oral language play and storytelling. Meaningful composition that gives room for creativity needs to allow children "time to journey towards writing" (Calkin, 2018, p. 19). This takes careful nurturing and support by adults to invite children into the writing learning experience, with the agency of the individual encouraged. This, therefore, leads us to the final area for consideration in this review of literature.

The role of the adult in supporting composition through oral storytelling

Gupta's (2009) study acknowledged that the breadth of learning from the dramatic storytelling curriculum was shaped by an innovative teacher. This supports Rogoff's (2003) notion of guided participation where the role of the teacher as both participator and guider of learning is paramount. Cremin et al. (2013) highlight the reciprocal relationship that exists between questioning, imagination and narrative. Carefully timed questions from practitioners creates the space for children's imaginations to develop narrative possibility thinking. This reflects the importance of imaginary narrative play becoming the child's own personal possession (Bredikyte & Hakkarainen, 2017) and the need for children to be personally invested in telling their own story, from their own perspective and in their own style (Hewitt & Inghilleri, 1993; Zumbrunn et al., 2017). Nicolopoulou's (2007) study of the interplay of play and narrative in children's development suggests that pretend play and storytelling begin as separate parallels and require the participatory modelling of the teacher to guide the two towards meeting and integrating. This seems to support the findings of Agosto's (2016) preliminary study of the effects of adults modelling storytelling which indicated a positive effect on visualisation, critical thinking and story sequencing seen in children's play-based narratives. Whilst this was a small-scale study, it does concur with Schrodts et al.'s (2022) study of the effectiveness of teacher-led strategies to support emergent narrative writing. The explicit modelling of narrative structures, ideas generation and expansion of ideas in storytelling were found to be highly effective teaching strategies. Verbal scaffolding alongside storytelling with varied props is a vital role for the teacher in supporting the expressive narrative skills of young children (Pesco & Gagné, 2017; Singer, 1995).

From the literature, it seems that children's early oral narrative competence, their imaginative capacity and their confidence in using spoken language to communicate their own stories is enriched by the opportunity to develop oral storytelling through playful opportunities in which children are personally invested. These are the foundational skills

for acquiring later success in writing (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014). However, as previously highlighted, the ELG for writing within the EYFS statutory framework (DFE, 2021b) gives no importance to oral composition. Cremin & Flewitt (2017) identify that the pressure to conform to such statutory requirements risks losing the importance of creativity in story composition that must be fostered through oral storytelling. The professional role of the teacher in planning and facilitating such educational experiences leads to my main research question and subsidiary questions:

- How do EYFS teachers develop children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity through oral storytelling?
 - How do teachers perceive their role in supporting children to be storytellers?
 - Does the inclusion of planned opportunities for oral storytelling have an impact on children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity?

Chapter 3: Research design

Introduction

In designing this study I took a pragmatist approach (Dawadi et al., 2021), recognising the value of both the objective measurement and reason of the positivist approach and the interpretivist recognition of the need to attend to the subjective perceptions of individuals involved in the research (Bell and Waters, 2018). In this chapter, I will further outline the methodology that informed my design, detail the design of the study and outline the analysis process. Limitations of the design will be discussed before detailing the ethical considerations.

Methodology

My design used a mixed methods approach of gathering both quantitative and qualitative data. This integrates the philosophical frameworks of both positivism and interpretivism. For me, the need for research to influence and guide future practice was paramount. The most important question guiding my approach was whether the research would help me find out what I wanted to know (Feilzer, 2010) and therefore provide insight into what works in practice. Primacy of the research question alongside the mixing of methods from different paradigms is aligned with the pragmatist philosophy underpinning my approach. The relative importance of the quantitative and qualitative data for answering the research questions was considered. In this study, the data was considered to have equal priority, allowing the research questions to be answered with both depth and breadth (Dawadi et al., 2021). I viewed this as helpful in potentially generating more substantive conclusions and highlighting further research areas which is particularly pertinent for small-scale study (Maxwell, 2016). Importantly, using a mixed methods approach allowed me to document what was truly happening (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) within the dynamics of a real early years classroom. Bringing both sets of data together at the point of interpretation allowed a full exploration of my main and subsidiary research questions.

Design of the study

The study was designed as a small-scale investigatory study, the findings of which would be explored for “reliability” rather than “generalisability” (Bassegy, 1981, p. 85). Bassegy asserts that reliability rather than generalisability is more important in allowing “a teacher working in a similar situation to relate his decision-making to that described in the case study” (p. 85). Given my priority of providing insight into what works in practice, and therefore informing future practice, this was particularly pertinent.

A summary of the overall design of the study is presented below.

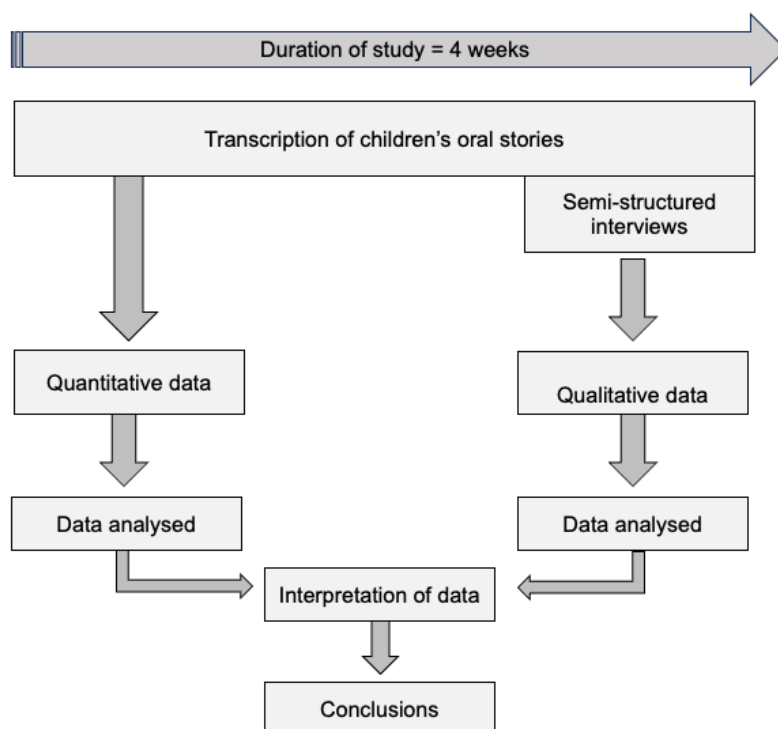


Figure 1

Diagrammatic representation of the overall study design

The study took place over four consecutive weeks during the summer term in the Reception classes of a two-form entry primary school in Northamptonshire. As can be seen above, the quantitative data and qualitative data were kept separate until the point of interpretation of data. At this point, the different data sets were considered together in order to best understand the research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Both sets of data were gathered concurrently, with qualitative data gathered during week four of the study period whilst the quantitative data was still being collected. This convergent parallel mixed methods design allowed for independent analysis followed by integration at the point of interpretation, helping me to gain a more complete picture of the research issue, with the potential for one set of findings to validate the other (Dawadi et al., 2021).

Data collection methods

Quantitative data

Eight children (four from each Reception class), balanced for gender, formed the study group. Because the children were very young (4 and 5 years), their teachers (rather than me) were asked to select the sample using assessment data linked to the guidance outlined in Development Matters (DFE, 2021a) to guide their choice. Children assessed

as working within age-related expectation in Speaking & Listening and Communication & Language were considered for the sample. Once this group had been established, the eight children for the sample group were randomly selected. Oral stories from children in the research group were written down and collected at the end of each of the four weeks of the research period. Each child told their story to their teacher on a one-to-one basis. These were written down by the teacher at the time of telling, with each transcript identifiable only by a letter and a number to ensure anonymity.

Qualitative data

To further understand the role of the teachers in supporting children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity through oral storytelling, and to explore their perceptions of their role and of the impact of oral storytelling, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher separately. This format of interviewing allowed me to ask questions within a predetermined thematic framework without the constraint of asking in a set order with set phrasing. Furthermore, opportunity for follow up questions to seek clarity or elaboration would provide richer, more detailed data. Importantly, semi-structured interviews allowed me to gain insight into what the interviewees considered important and relevant – their perspective had primacy (Edwards & Holland, 2013). One round of semi-structured interviews, between 30 and 40 minutes in length, was undertaken with each teacher at the start of week four of the study period. An interview proforma was prepared to allow me to cover key themes and topics (Appendix A) and give the interviews some level of structure without being restrictive. These interviews were audio-recorded to allow me to transcribe them after the interviews and then analyse the participant responses. The recording of the interview made it easier for me to focus on the interview content and my verbal prompts during the interviews and enabled me to generate a verbatim transcript of the interview (Jamshed, 2014).

Data analysis process

Quantitative data analysis

Following exploration of previous studies of narrative competence, I decided to draw specifically on three studies to inform my quantitative data analysis. Organisation within a narrative (coherence and cohesion) is considered a key measure of narrative competence (Cain, 2003; Cain & Oakhill, 1996; Shapiro & Hudson, 1991). Cain (2003) asserts that, when crafting narrative, mastery of structural coherence enables children to focus on establishing linguistic cohesion. Therefore, both aspects were important in the data analysis process. Additionally, assessment of the inclusion of core story conventions would provide a marker of narrative knowledge (Cain, 2003). Quantitative data analysis therefore followed a three-step process as follows:

1. Story conventions were analysed against each of the four story conventions identified by Cain (2003) in her study of the relationship between comprehension skills and narrative production with 6-8-year-olds:
 - temporal openings (e.g. Once upon a time; There once was)
 - character/setting information
 - scene-setting information (e.g. They decided to go to the jungle to find some animals)
 - endings (e.g. Finally; The end; happily ever after).
2. Story event structure as a measure of coherence was analysed using Cain & Oakhill's (1996) three category classification used in their study of the relationship between comprehension skill and the ability to tell a story with British 7-8-year-olds as follows:
 - Non-stories: stories that were either completely incoherent or lacked any event sequence;
 - Intermediate stories: stories that contained a sequence of events but did not establish causality between them;
 - Complete stories: stories that comprised a series of events (causally linked) and had an ending that was dependent on a previous action in the narrative.
3. Use of connectives were analysed as a measure of cohesion using Shapiro & Hudson's (1991) criterion from their study of coherence and cohesion in picture-elicited narratives with 4-6-year-olds in the USA as follows:
 - The total number of propositions were calculated. Propositions are defined as statements with a subject (that defines 'who') and a predicate (that describes what the subject does).
 - Within each proposition, the number of inter-clausal connectives were calculated i.e. the conjunctions used to link propositions. These were classified according to the relationship they specified between the two clauses as follows:
 - Independent, comprising continuative conjunctions such as 'until' and additive conjunctions such as 'and'
 - Temporal e.g. then, first, after
 - Dependent, comprising adversative conjunctions such as 'but' and causal conjunctions such as 'because'.
 - The proportion of each type of inter-clausal connective was expressed as a proportion of all linked clauses as an indicator of local cohesion.

Qualitative data analysis

Recognising the value of the unique viewpoints of the participants (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018), I decided to conduct a thematic analysis which would allow me to search across my entire data set to find “repeated patterns of meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86) that would reflect the content of the entire data set. To ensure clarity of process to support evaluation of the research, allow comparison with similar research and support replication in the future (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I followed Braun & Clarke’s six phase approach:

- Familiarising yourself with the data;
- Generating initial codes;
- Searching for themes;
- Defining and naming themes;
- Interpreting and concluding;
- Writing up.

Design limitations

Concurring with Charteris & Smardon (2018), pupil voice and agency are very important to me. Given that the aim of this research was to inform future practice, hearing from the pupils who were, and would be, directly experiencing the learning and support was an area that I considered when designing the study. However, due to the age of the pupils and the limitations of available time to be in the school, I decided not to include pupil voice in this study. This would be an important area to consider for future research in this area.

The fact that the teachers were writing down the children’s stories at the point of telling was considered a potential limitation, since the lack of an audio-recorded transcript meant that I was reliant on teachers providing an accurate, verbatim transcript. However, the teachers (and children) are very used to this practice and, in order to minimise potential impact, they were asked to make clear on the transcript any verbal prompts given or comments made by the teacher.

Thinking further about how findings may inform classroom practice, a further limitation to this study lies in whether or not it would be possible to generalise the findings. Whilst a mixed methods approach may provide greater certainty in, and wider implication for, the conclusions (Maxwell, 2016) one must question how representative this small-scale study was: it is possible that the findings were unique to the specific context of this study.

However, the triangulation aspect of the mixed methods approach may mitigate this to some extent by leading to a well-validated conclusion and promoting the credibility of inferences gained from each data set (Venkatesh et al., 2013). Equally, conclusions drawn from findings would focus on reliability rather than generalisability as previously noted.

The school in which the study was conducted is known to me and I have professional relationships with the participating teachers. Whilst I was keen to “know what you [the teachers] know in the way that you know it” (Spradley, 1979, p. 34), it was important for me to couch questions and prompts carefully so that there was no unwitting hint of any expectation (from me) for the answer (Bell & Waters, 2018).

Ethical considerations

Throughout the research process, the ethical guidelines detailed by the British Educational Research Association (2018) [BERA] were observed. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Exeter ethics committee prior to commencing data collection (see Appendix B). In line with BERA recommendations, I ensured full transparency of information via detailed information sheets (see Appendix C), upheld informed participant consent (see Appendix D) and maintained the privacy of all participants through secure data storage and anonymity.

Oral storytelling and story invention form part of normal whole class teaching within the participating school as part of the EYFS curriculum for Communication & Language, and Literacy. The participating children were not extracted just for the purpose of the research and collection of oral stories forms part of normal assessment of attainment. Parents/Caregivers received an information sheet about the proposed study and were asked to consent to their child’s anonymised data being used in the research study. Due to the age, and therefore understanding, of the children (4-5 years), they were not asked to give voluntary, informed consent.

Because the research activities were part of normal classroom practice, there was no requirement for teachers to plan additional activities and no additional time pressures in terms of preparation or delivery of teaching. Semi-structured interviews took place as part of directed hours and did not, therefore, constitute additional time commitment for the teachers. Whilst I considered the content of interviews was unlikely to cause upset, I was careful to avoid any potential for teachers to feel their teaching was being ‘judged’ by emphasising my interest was in what they were doing, not what they were not doing.

However, participants were informed that if they felt uncomfortable in answering any of the questions, they could choose to not answer.

The practice of oral storytelling was known to the children and ensuring stories were transcribed by a familiar adult provided protection against stress for the children. However, it was made clear to teachers that should a child display or state that they felt stressed, the story telling should be paused or postponed.

In summary, the pragmatist approach that I adopted for this study allowed me to have a pluralistic stance of gathering different types of data in order to best answer my research questions (Dawadi et al., 2021) and inform future practice. A mixed methods design offered a more holistic view of the research issue and provided additional insights into different components of the area being studied (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016), as will be outlined in chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Findings

Quantitative data

Absence of one of the children in the sample group reduced the total number of stories collected from 32 to 31. Appendix E provides some examples of the children's stories.

Story conventions

Analysis of use of the four story conventions is graphically summarised below (see Appendix F for tabulated results). One point was allocated for the inclusion of each of the four conventions.

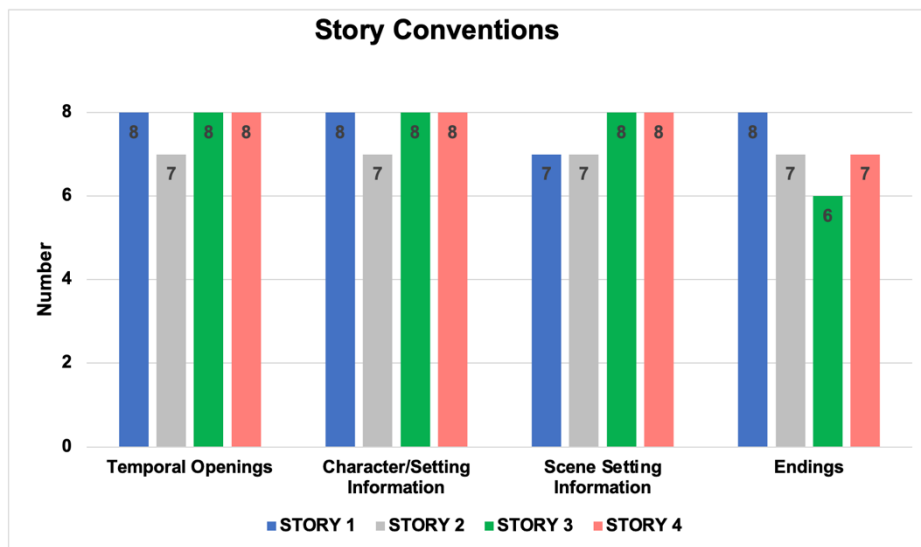


Figure 2

Analysis of the use of story conventions

Temporal openings

Each of the 31 stories contained a temporal opening. This reflects the fact that oral story telling is part of normal practice in the two Reception classes. Children were already familiar with the opening *Once upon a time* and brought their prior knowledge to telling their stories in this study. There was no variation in temporal openings – all 31 stories began with *Once upon a time*.

Character/setting information

Each of the 31 stories gave character information but setting information was much less detailed and not included in every story (see Appendix G for an example from stories collected).

Scene setting information

30 of the stories contained scene setting information. This was primarily given in sentences beginning *One day* or *Unfortunately*.

Endings

28 of the stories showed a story ending and were therefore credited in the analysis. Notably, however, there was variety in the strength of the endings with some drawing the story to a logical conclusion whilst others ended without reference to preceding parts of the story (see Appendix H for examples from stories collected).

Story event structure

Across the 31 samples, there were no examples of non-stories. i.e. none were completely incoherent and all had some form of event sequence. The analysis of story event structure is graphically summarised below (see Appendix I for tabulated results).

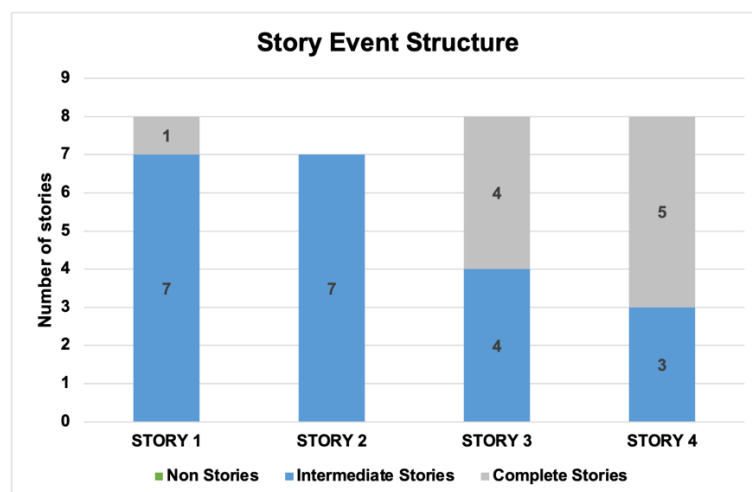


Figure 3

Analysis of story event structure

Apart from Story two examples (one child was absent this week), there was a general increase across the study period in the number of complete stories compared to intermediate stories.

Use of connectives

Analysis of use of the use of connectives is graphically summarised below (see Appendix J for tabulated results).

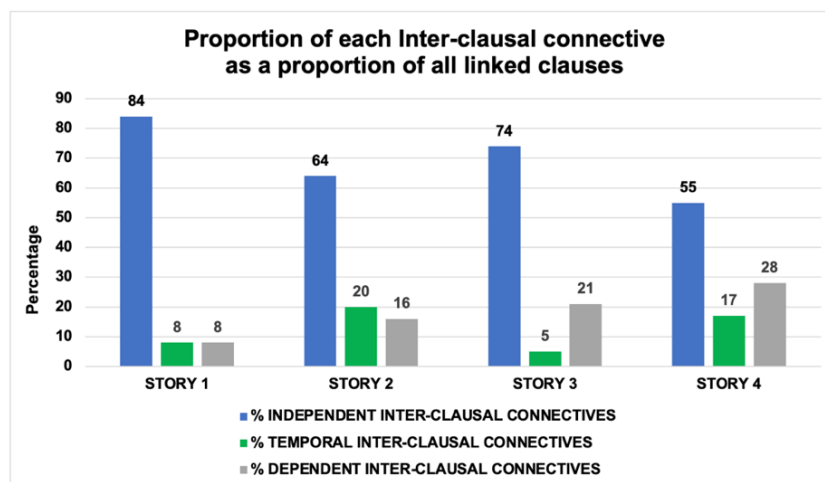


Figure 4

Analysis of use of connectives

The following findings were noted:

- Over the study period, the number of propositions increased from Story one (60) to Story four (87).
- Of the total number of propositions, the number with inter-clausal links increased from Story one (24) to Story two (40), then dipped slightly in Story three (38) before rising again in Story four (53).
- Propositions with independent inter-clausal links had the highest frequency of use in each story set (one to four) with those with dependent and temporal inter-clausal links much lower in each set. Notably, one child's Story two (see Appendix K) had a high number of temporal inter-clausal links compared to the others which may account for the increased frequency across Story two, whereas the distribution in Story four (which was also higher) was more evenly spread across the stories.
- Use of dependent inter-clausal links showed steady increase from Story one to Story four.

Qualitative data analysis

In order to analyse the qualitative data from the two teacher interviews (see Appendix L for one of the full interview transcripts), using the process outlined in chapter three, I decided to use an inductive approach which involved coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame based on my preconceptions linked to my research

questions (Frith & Gleeson, 2008). My initial coding created two broad initial themes associated, firstly, with what teachers did and, secondly, with how children responded. In further rounds of coding, I used three types of coding to fully explore the data - descriptive coding, in vivo coding and process coding (Cohen et al., 2018).

From multiple rounds of coding, my initial themes were refined into three core themes (see Appendix M for a visual representation of coding within the three themes) which this chapter will report:

- teacher modelling;
- creating confidence;
- impact.

Teacher modelling

Teachers regularly mentioned the importance of resources when talking about their own modelling of the oral storytelling/invention process. Resources, in particular the use of visual story maps (see Appendix N for an example of a teacher’s story map), was also highlighted in relation to bridging from adult-led activities to child-initiated, independent story invention. For example, in this extract, T2 highlighted how central the modelling of the visual story map was in directly supporting children to create their own stories:

I think having that visual, a story map, is key. Because that’s something they’ve gone away and done independently – ‘write’ their stories. There’s no barrier there. Everyone can do it, because they’re recording it pictorially and some can put words in as well.

This is illustrated below in an example of a child’s independent capture of one of their stories on a story map.

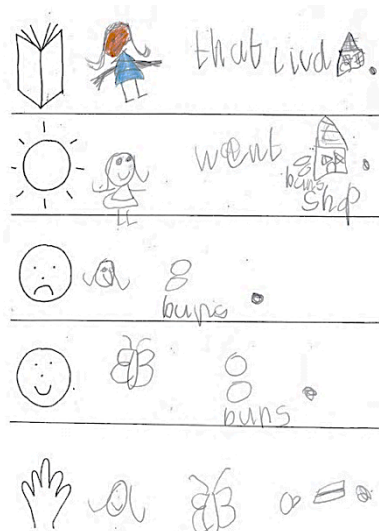


Figure 5
Child’s story map

Building on this, teachers often evoked the notion of story maps (referred to below as the S plan) acting as a scaffold that allowed the children to invent their own stories in continuous provision, defined by Bryce-Clegg (2013) as “to continue the provision for learning in the absence of an adult” (p. 4). For example, T1 described how “the S plan helped them to explore the story language that they could use independently in the provision, in their play” and its importance in initiating independent storytelling by helping to “fire their imagination and get into story in their own kind of creative way”.

Use of symbols linked to sentence starters was frequently mentioned as important for the modelling of core story structure linked to both language and sentence order. T1 identified that “it gives them clarity for setting it out when they are coming to writing it down” and that “they’re starting to think about the actual structure of the sentences and how that would look on a page”. Modelling using concrete resources (see Appendix O for an example of characters in a story bag) alongside the visuals was noted as significant in supporting children as storytellers in their own right, described by T2 as giving children “an element of choice”.

Thinking skills were often mentioned by the teachers as an important aspect to model. In the following extract, T1 described “thinking aloud” which led her to reflect on how this supported the children to think:

And as we're modelling we're sort of thinking aloud. “Oh, okay, so in the beginning of the story, the tiger was feeling sad, because he'd got a sore tooth or something. How are we going to now put that into the end so it kind of matches and the problem is solved?”. So I think the modelling has helped the children sort of think about how everything builds and fits in the story.

The notion of coherence was regularly mentioned as an important aspect of modelling thinking. T2 described that, in story invention, children “found it hard to think of a problem but also to think of how we are going to solve this problem so that the story is coherent”. She described modelling as helping them “to think of a sensible solution, a logical solution from what’s happened in the story”.

Creating confidence

Linking with, and building on from, the theme of teacher modelling, teachers referred frequently to the importance for children of creating confidence in their ability to compose and tell stories. A sense of ownership and choice for children in telling their own stories was an aspect that recurred across all the themes, with teachers describing ways in

which children displayed increased self-esteem and pride in their stories as these were valued in the story-telling process. For example, in the following extract, T1 described how children developed an increased sense of the value of the story they wanted to tell and were less constrained by their transcriptional ability:

But even if the children can't, or don't feel confident to go and write it, they're still getting their ideas, and that is all being valued. That's coming across really strongly, that sense of valuing what they're giving us rather than the value being in the words they can actually put on the page. The value is in the story that they have to tell.

A further aspect that both teachers highlighted was the link between children gaining confidence with generating and sharing ideas and the importance of developing a strong learning community that supported this. T1 used the phrase “they can bounce off each other” to capture that sense of shared responsibility within a supportive, nurturing environment. This is further illustrated by T2’s observation that “they’ve got a lot more confident with sharing. They’re sharing their ideas and not worrying about it. They’re quite happy to put their hands up and give their ideas. We’ve got too many ideas coming in at times!”.

Having the core five sentence structure (Once upon a time; One day; Unfortunately; Luckily; Finally) was a recurrent element mentioned in the interviews, specifically in relation to its importance in building children’s confidence. For example, in the following extract, T2 highlighted this as the most significant aspect:

I think definitely it'd be that five sentence structure. So the children know straight away how to start their story - 'Once upon a time'. They know then they're going to have their 'One day' and that gives them confidence. Actually, as it's progressed a little bit, they're starting to play around with that 'One day' and changing it. So I think having that basic structure has really helped them. It's kind of like a safety net for them whilst they build confidence.

Interestingly, a further element that both teachers described was the impact on adult confidence of the communal story-telling sessions using the five sentence structure. T1 talked about how story-telling sessions “just gave us teachers confidence to begin with initially” but then went on to describe the ongoing impact, saying that “with the children we've kind of learned to be a little bit more loose, not restricted by what's in the bag [referring to the stimulus props]. Being a bit more imaginative with it a little bit”.

Impact

Both teachers described three areas of impact – progress in skills, development of imagination and creativity, and fostering enjoyment and curiosity.

Progress in skills

This arose from teachers talking frequently about progress in word level skills and sentence construction skills. This gave an indication of development in children's ability to create local cohesion (within and between sentences). At word level, teachers talked very specifically about progress in use of, for example, determiners, connectives, sentence starters and specific vocabulary. For example, T2 described how she was starting to see use of connectives and commented that "initially, they used to use 'and' quite a lot, but we've got more 'who', 'until', 'but', 'then' and even a 'because'". At sentence level, both teachers referred to the impact being seen in children using full sentences to tell their story and, in particular, using "grammatically okay sentences" (T2). A further area regularly mentioned was the impact on social skills as the children worked communally to build a class story. This is illustrated in the following extract from T2:

Turn taking and listening skills have really improved. Child G often found it quite hard to listen. He wanted to call out or for us to use all of his ideas, but actually he's learned to listen to other people's ideas, take turns, put his hand up. So I think actually their listening skills and being sensitive to other children's ideas has improved.

Development of imagination and creativity

Both teachers referred to very specific aspects of storytelling that they felt had impact on imagination and creativity. T1 talked about the fact that the children in her sample group were actually quite creative and able to give ideas for a story. However, she further elaborated describing, "now what they have is more structured ideas that fit coherently together". In fact, teachers' observation of how they had been able to challenge children's ideas and help them think more creatively as confidence built across the study period was a recurring theme. This was closely linked to the concrete resources provided as a stimulus for stories. This was illustrated clearly by T2 below:

So children quite naturally will go for "if I've got this character and this one I know the sort of story" but by having quite random characters or objects that don't necessarily go together they were more creative actually. The story can go their way and they can lead the story more because I've not necessarily always given that preconceived idea. So it's kind of freeing in a way.

Equally, teachers described how an increasing sense of children's ownership also led them to exercise their own imagination and creativity, expressed by T1's observation that "now what we're noticing, we might get one or two characters out of the bag, but actually, they want to go somewhere else with the story. So, that's great."

Fostering enjoyment and curiosity

The teachers regularly evoked a sense of enjoyment in the story-telling process and referred to the sense of expectation that the story-telling sessions created. T1 referred to this as "being enthusiastic and creating that awe and wonder". T2 captured a similar sense of expectation when she described the fact that "the children love it" and "look forward to that time when we make up a story". This was highlighted by both teachers as an important element that supported progression. T1 described how children were excited to create stories and keen to discover for themselves the possibilities for where their story could go. This created strong motivation to engage in the storytelling away from the specific learning activities in wider play. For example, she commented, "And you can hear it even when they haven't got the story bag and they're playing with the role play. You can hear that actually it's starting to have a bit of an effect" and "I think focusing on it regularly has just got them engaged and excited about it and about stories."

Having analysed both sets of data separately, they were then combined in order to interpret the findings. This will form the basis of the discussion in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore how oral storytelling supports the development of narrative competence, confidence and creativity in children in the EYFS phase of education. Related to this, the overarching research question was:

How do EYFS teachers develop children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity through oral storytelling?

Subsidiary questions to support this were:

How do teachers perceive their role in supporting children to be storytellers?

Does the inclusion of planned opportunities for oral storytelling have an impact on children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity?

The purpose of this chapter is to explore and interpret the findings outlined in chapter four in depth, bringing together quantitative and qualitative data and making connections to previous research outlined in chapter two. To structure the discussion around interpretation of findings, this section focuses back on my main research question and the specific aspects of development this study explored – narrative competence, confidence and creativity.

Narrative competence

The findings from this study indicate that oral storytelling had a positive impact on the development of oral narrative competence. This has importance in relation to Pinto et al.'s (2016) assertion that early oral narrative skills are a predictor of later achievement in written narrative outcomes. Whilst Pinto et al.'s findings were linked solely to scripted story to prompt children's oral stories, this study adds a further dimension since the prompts used were both pictorial (story maps) and concrete (props in story bags). Despite the different stimuli, development of narrative competence was seen across the study period. Further study over a longer period, in line with Pinto et al.'s longitudinal study, would be required to determine whether the growth in oral narrative competence correlates with high attainment in writing later on as seen in Pinto et al.'s study.

Children engaged positively with the process of composition – they enjoyed and looked forward to oral storytelling sessions. This is recognised as an essential component of beginning to recognise their own voice as a writer (Lipson et al., 2000). The lack of attention to transcriptional skills as part of the process of creating story in this study could be criticised as potentially failing to develop writers who can convey their intended message and ideas to an audience without being physically present (MacArthur & Graham, 2015). However, writing in young children develops at many levels

simultaneously, with oral and symbolic representation developing ahead of written letters and words (Genishi & Dyson, 2015). This study suggests that children were orally able to convey increasingly complex ideas to an audience. Mackenzie (2011) highlights the role that drawing plays in allowing children to represent their thoughts and ideas as part of the story composing process. She posits that if drawing and writing are seen as a unified system for making and conveying meaning, children can create more complex text than words alone would allow. The findings from this study concur with this. The pictorial story maps created by the teachers (see Appendix N) during communal storytelling sessions included some key words and were not only a visual prompt for the children but also provided a bridge into independent story invention in continuous provision. The children's oral stories, latterly supported by symbolic transcription on story maps for some children (see Appendix P), indicated that they were not only able to create coherent and cohesive stories but were also able to have ownership of creating their own stories (Young & Ferguson, 2021). However, the limiting nature of oral storytelling in terms of audience reach is a valid criticism. Hence the argument that basic transcriptional skills should be developed in tandem with compositional skills (MacArthur & Graham, 2015) must be considered if children's stories are to reach a wider audience over time. However, the findings of this study suggest that giving children time to compose their stories without the pressure of having to transcribe in words allowed them space to find and formulate what they wanted to say in a coherent and cohesive way. Harme's (2020) assertion that focusing on transcription at the same time as composition easily leads to cognitive overload due to the high cognitive demand of composition is an important consideration. Whilst the development of transcriptional skills is clearly a necessity to allow children to communicate to an audience without it being physically present, the danger of overemphasising transcriptional elements that require effort and attention in young children may inhibit expression of ideas (Bloodgood, 2002). It is understandable that having to switch attention during composing to thinking about transcription can lead to children forgetting their writing ideas (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) which strengthens the value of oral story composition in its own right. Over the four weeks of this study, children had time to internalise the five sentence story structure into their long term memory and they then had this an available resource when composing their own stories. In keeping with Imray & Clements' (2020) findings, children were then able to adapt and manipulate characters, settings and events to create their own stories whilst sustaining a coherent structure because they had the knowledge to underpin the creative choices they could make (Boden, 2001).

Wegerif (2005) posits that playful spoken language is central to the development of links and ideas in stories. Concurring with this, the fact that children engaged in oral

storytelling in both adult-initiated and self-initiated play was an important part of their narrative competence development. Their playful talk, drawing on their shared storytelling experiences, served as an oral rehearsal for the linguistic and structural demands of story composition (Cremin & Myhill, 2012). Shared storytelling sessions, led by the teacher, supported narrative development by allowing children to hear and build on the ideas of others. This supports Gardner's (2018) notion of the need to pay attention to the social and collaborative aspects that are essential for communicating thoughts and ideas to an audience. An unanticipated finding from qualitative data was the impact on social skills. Findings suggest that children's ability to listen, take turns and appreciate the views and ideas of others developed over the period of study, as highlighted by Harrett (2009) who posits that storytelling "encourages the art of listening as a storytelling session presupposes listeners who play an active part in the process" (p. 3).

Teacher modelling played a vital role in supporting the development of narrative competence. Concurring with Nicolopoulou (2007), the qualitative data gathered suggests that teacher modelling was central to the development of children's understanding of story structure, story language and the generation/development of ideas for key aspects of story conventions such as character, setting and what happens in the story. Linked to this, the findings indicate that capturing the storytelling process visually on a story map using symbols linked to core story language was an important part of developing that understanding for the children (MacKenzie, 2011). Findings further indicate that teacher modelling of the story invention and storytelling process had a direct influence on children then choosing to invent and tell their own stories in both linked activities and in their self-initiated play in the continuous provision, as highlighted by Calkin (2018). Furthermore, the findings suggest that understanding the story creator's thought processes supported children to create overall coherence and cohesion in their independent oral stories. This concurs with Englert et al.'s (1991) notion that modelling the "inner dialogue for talking to oneself about one's writing" (p. 339) is a central part of effective instruction for writing.

Quantitative data correlated with key aspects of the findings from qualitative data. Children showed consistent knowledge and use of story conventions such as openings (using associated language appropriately), character and setting information, scene setting information and endings (Cain, 2003). Analysis of story event structure showed developing coherence across the four weeks of the study; there was an increase in the number of complete stories, demonstrating increased inclusion of causally linked events. Data around use of inter-clausal connectives showed that stories also developed greater cohesion over the study period (Shapiro & Hudson, 1991). Furthermore, findings showed an increase in the range of inter-clausal connectives used from Story one to Story four;

there was a greater number of temporal and dependent as well as independent inter-clausal connectives. This suggests that children's ability to make adversative and clausal links as well as additive and continuative links, as outlined by Shapiro & Hudson, had developed which is consistent with the findings relating to coherence. These findings concur with Schrodts et al.'s (2022) finding that explicit modelling of cohesive structures alongside the generation and expansion of ideas in storytelling was highly effective.

As in previous studies (Pesco & Gagné, 2017; Singer, 1995), teachers in this study provided carefully planned verbal scaffolds for the children as part of the communal storytelling experience. Their insistence on correct use of specific language linked to story structure (Once upon a time - opening; One day – build up; Unfortunately - problem; Luckily - resolution; Finally - ending) supported creativity initially as it gave the children a secure framework within which to develop their ideas. However, it was noticeable that children hugged this language across the study and it could be argued that once the children developed understanding of, and confidence with, the structure the language restricted freedom to create. It is reasonable to question whether the five sentence structure, whilst supporting coherence, also constrained children's freedom to develop their own ways of representing their world and their experience (Calkin, 2018). Notably, Rogoff (2003) highlights the dual role of teacher as both guider of and participator in learning. There is clear evidence that teachers in this study fulfilled the role of guider effectively but perhaps the role of participator (rather than modeller) requires further consideration. Nicolopoulou's (2007) study demonstrated the importance of participatory modelling to interpret the parallel activities of pretend play and storytelling together. It would be interesting to see whether the clear impact of teacher modelling in this study would be strengthened by teachers also modelling through participatory play in continuous provision.

Narrative confidence

In this study, the development of children's narrative competence was closely linked with confidence. Qualitative findings indicated that daily oral story invention and storytelling increased children's confidence to compose and tell their own stories. The data suggests that consistent use of a core story structure (in this study the five sentence story) supported the development of confidence. Both qualitative and quantitative data suggest progress across the study period in creating cohesion at a local level within (use of inter-clausal connectives) and between (use of story conventions) sentences. Additionally, qualitative findings indicate that the communal story invention and storytelling supported children's ability to generate and develop meaningful ideas, referred to by Faulkner (2017) as "collective meaning making" (p. 99) through storytelling.

The five sentence story structure with associated language was an important aspect that supported the development of coherence in children's stories. However, it was also significant in creating the secure foundation on which to build stories which increased children's confidence to tell their stories and experiment with events within the stories. This mirrors Bloodgood's (2002) assertion that the development of confidence as a writer directly correlates with having core knowledge and the opportunity to exercise this independently without "undue emphasis on correctness" (p. 36). A key finding in this study was the importance of the value placed in the stories the children told, irrespective of the level of coherence and cohesion, by the adult listening and transcribing them. This concurs with Daffern & Mackenzie's (2015) notion of the importance of children having something to say and a real, appreciative audience. As noted by Gardner (2018), the shared experience of storytelling in adult-led sessions equally facilitated the opportunity for children share ideas and have them valued by a wider audience than in the one-to-one adult and child situation. The immediacy of the spoken word allowed the children to gain instant gratification from the response of others which was likely to have increased confidence in their ideas for the direction of a story (Beattie, 2007; Safford et al., 2004). As previously identified, an unexpected finding in this study was the impact on children's social skills as they learned to listen appreciatively. The fact that children were empowered to share their thoughts and ideas facilitated a growth in the understanding of how important it was to value the ideas of others (Dyson, 2003).

The use of story bags to support ideas generation for children's independent oral stories allowed the children to extend their experience of characters and objects. As the qualitative findings revealed, this created confidence for children to challenge their ideas around characters and events and hence experiment beyond the comfort zone of their prior experience (Young & Ferguson, 2021).

Creativity in narrative

Within this study, findings indicate that children were able to think more creatively as confidence in their storytelling ability built. Whilst confidence and creativity were explored in their own right, the findings suggests that they were mutually dependent aspects – as the children grew in confidence, they were able to explore more creative options but equally as they experimented and became more creative, their confidence grew. This supports Zumbrunn et al.'s (2017) assertion that children's belief about themselves as a writer and their confidence in their abilities are important aspects of creating the volition to explore possibilities for their writing. Certainly, over the four week study period, children developed the ability and willingness to include more varied characters in their stories, moving beyond their existing framework of characters that fit together e.g.

dragons, princesses and knights. Boden's (2001) view that core knowledge is a precondition for creativity plays into this.

In this study, the use of story bags independently as part of play-based learning was important in allowing children to become creative with their use of language in storytelling. In keeping with Craft's (2005) notion of possibility thinking lying at the heart of creativity, the shared storytelling experiences with adults modelling and the careful choice of characters and objects in the story bags supported the children to think divergently and consider a broader range of possibilities. However, whether this supported children to recognise, as identified by Cremin & Myhill (2012), the "infinite possibilities of language" (p. 23) via oral storytelling may be questioned. This draws attention to the classroom dilemma of balancing structure (via adult-initiated learning) and freedom (via child-initiated learning) highlighted by Craft et al. (2008). Towards the end of the four week period, the teachers recognised the potential to restrict the children's self-determination and capacity to develop their self-motivated ideas. Equally, it must be acknowledged that the same level of structure in shared storytelling at the start of the study was important in creating confidence to experiment within the structural boundaries. Total freedom at this point may have been confusing and limiting. Concurring with Craft et al. (2008), teachers in this study recognised the importance of noticing how children were responding and engaging in storytelling sessions in seeking to achieve the right balance. Risk-taking and experimentation are core components that foster creativity (Calkin, 2018; Cremin & Myhill, 2012; Grainger et al., 2005) and future study could usefully consider more closely how teachers could develop a framework for fostering creativity in storytelling through risk-taking and experimentation whilst also attending to the need to create confidence to take these risks.

Concluding summary

Teacher modelling of story structure and language, ideas generation and the thought processes involved in story invention had a clear impact on children's independent storytelling and invention. The use of a core story structure (the five sentence story) and communal storytelling experiences supported children's ability to generate and develop ideas and their motivation to engage in independent storytelling. The use of pictorial and concrete resources was important in creating the confidence to explore possibilities within story beyond children's existing experiences.

Considering the main research question (*How do EYFS teachers develop children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity through oral storytelling?*), this study indicated that teacher modelling in a shared experience alongside children, coupled with

resources to bridge the gap between supported and independent learning, facilitated the development of children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity. Teacher's perception of their role as model, guide and facilitator of the oral storytelling process developed across the four weeks of the study. The opportunities for oral storytelling that were carefully planned into both adult and child initiated learning had a clear impact on children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity.

This discussion has also highlighted some of the potential limiting factors that emerged in this study that could indicate useful future study. Both limitations and recommendations will be explored in chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This small-scale study sought to explore how EYFS teachers support the development of children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity through oral storytelling and has demonstrated:

- the importance of teacher modelling of:
 - story language and structure;
 - generating ideas for story and linking them coherently and cohesively;
 - the thought processes involved in creating story;
- the necessity for structures and resources to develop children's understanding of and confidence in building coherent and cohesive stories orally;
- the impact that planned opportunities for oral storytelling, both directed and initiated by adults and initiated by children in self-directed learning, have on children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity.

Contributions

The findings from this study contribute and add to existing literature and knowledge in four key areas.

1. This study has highlighted that the role of the teacher must develop and change as young children's narrative competence, confidence and creativity develop in order to be effective. At an early stage in children's ability to orally invent and tell stories, the teacher as model has primacy but as competence, confidence and creativity grow the role assumes more of a guiding and facilitating focus. As discussed in chapter five, if teachers remain in the role of model for too long with the aim of developing confidence, then what began as an effective scaffold for learning risks restricting both competence and creativity. The reflections of teachers in this study have added further insight into the importance of teachers purposefully noticing the nature of children's contributions and the level of engagement over time so that they can adapt their role accordingly. Through this, an appropriate balance between structure and freedom can be achieved to support both divergent (possibilities) and convergent (choice making) thinking in young children.
2. A clear sense of the importance of focusing on the compositional aspect of creating story in its own right and separate from transcriptional aspects has emerged from this study. This is significant in ensuring that children are not constrained by their transcriptional ability at such an early stage of development and that progress in elements such as story conventions, story structure,

language choices and generation of ideas and possibilities are not overshadowed by transcriptional elements such as spelling and handwriting.

3. This study demonstrated the importance of the five sentence structure as an age-appropriate way to create understanding of the core components of story structure. Importantly, if this is supported by simple, transferable pictorial representations, children's understanding of both story structure and associated language can be effectively promoted.
4. Findings from the research indicate that a holistic rather than segmented view of how each aspect (competence, confidence and creativity) both contributes to and influences children's growth as storytellers is helpful. Whilst each was explored individually, the way in which all three interrelate became of prime importance in seeking to learn how teachers can best support development.

Implications and recommendations

EYFS practice

This study has highlighted the importance of the modelling role of the teacher in making visible and overt what may otherwise, for young children, be covert (Englert et al., 1991) in the development of narrative competence, confidence and creativity. Ensuring that composition via oral storytelling has distinct importance and priority in the curriculum is crucial. This has implications for time and space in already busy days but the findings from this study suggest the benefits to children of including both shared and independent oral storytelling opportunities are important both at this stage and in future stages of their education. Therefore, it is recommended that oral storytelling is included as an ongoing and recurring part of the literacy curriculum. Starting this at the beginning of the school year would facilitate progression in the role of the teacher from modelling to guiding to facilitating (Rogoff, 2003).

Policy

As was highlighted in chapter two, whilst the current statutory curriculum for EYFS notes that writing involves both transcription and composition, the ELG for writing focuses solely on transcription. Composition is defined in the statutory framework as "articulating ideas and structuring them in speech, before writing" (DFE, 2021b, p. 9). There are clear parallels between this definition and the definition of oral storytelling outlined in the chapter one and the importance of composition should, therefore, assume equal weighting with transcription. It is recommended that policy makers should review the current ELG for writing to ensure that it reflects the importance of composition.

Research

The findings from this study have highlighted important considerations for EYFS practice in relation to the development of compositional aspects of writing. As previously noted in chapter four, the inclusion of opportunities for adults to model oral storytelling and for children to practise independently supported the development of oral narrative competence in children's stories. It would be valuable to follow up this study by tracking the children's progress in writing across Key Stage 1 as transcriptional skills develop to see whether oral narrative competence in EYFS correlates with later achievement outcomes in writing. This would provide additional insights (either supportive or contradictory) to add to existing research such as that of Pinto et al., 2016.

The discussion in chapter five also drew attention to elements of teacher support which, though effective in this study, may have limited progress in narrative competence, confidence and creativity over a longer timescale. Therefore, the following two suggestions for future research are made:

1. A study which explores the impact of participatory modelling by teachers in child-initiated play in continuous provision. This would provide insight into the impact of teachers modelling by participating in play-based activities alongside children as opposed to the explicit modelling of direct teaching.
2. Further exploration of the impact of gradually adapting the teacher role in supporting oral storytelling, from model to guide to facilitator as understanding of story structure, conventions and language develops. This could provide valuable insight into whether or not this adaptation supports the continued development of narrative competence, confidence and creativity.

Limitations

In all research, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. The most significant limitations in this study were the sample size and length of study. As previously noted, this was a small-scale study involving eight children in two classes in one school. As such, whilst the findings may be relatable to other EYFS classes, they cannot be generalised.

Due to time restrictions and sensitivity to the age of the children, their perceptions of themselves as storytellers were not explored. Pupil voice and agency of the child are important, however, and should be considered in future research in this area.

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Appendix A

Interview proforma



University
of Exeter

Semi-structured interview guide with

Introductory brief

- "Thank you for agreeing to participate"
- Brief explanation of the project
- Explain – I am interested in their personal views and experiences
- Review consent (signed Teacher consent form) and check they have read the Information Sheet
- Do they have any questions before the start of the interview
- State how long the interview will approx. last (40 mins)

Teacher Interview Questions:

Part 1

Story telling/Story invention activities

Prompts:

Can you talk to me about the sorts of storytelling/story invention activities your children have been doing?

- a. Tell me more about the adult-led/adult-initiated activities.
- b. Tell me more about the child-initiated activities.

Part 2

Teacher modelling

Prompts:

Thinking more specifically now about your modelling, can you talk about what impact (if any) you feel this has had.

- a. Tell me about the aspects you feel were most beneficial in supporting the children to tell/make up their own stories. Why do think this was the case?
- b. Thinking now about helping children **generate ideas** for their own stories, what are your thoughts about whether teacher modelling supported this. Were there any aspects of teaching that you feel had greater impact? Why do you think this was?
- c. Thinking now about **supporting composition**, what are your thoughts about whether teacher modelling supported this. Were there any aspects of teaching that you feel had greater impact? Why do you think this was?
- d. Were there any direct teaching opportunities that you feel did not have any/had minimal impact? Why do think this was the case?
- e. Do you feel there was any difference in children's response to adult-directed (activities guided throughout by you) or adult-initiated (activities introduced by you but then guided by the child) activities? If so, tell me about this? Why do you think this was the case?

Part 3
Children's invented stories

Prompts:

Turning now to think about children making up their own stories, talk to me about you have noticed over the 4-week study period.

- a. Tell me about your observations on whether their creativity through their ideas within a story developed.
- b. Thinking about composition, what did you notice?
- c. Were there any things that you did or provided that you feel added positively to children's experience of storytelling/story invention? Tell me more about this – enjoyment? engagement? attainment?
- d. What about any aspects that didn't work so well?

Part 4 Implications for future practice

Prompts:

Thinking now about the future, what would you keep doing/develop? Why?

Are there any things you would stop doing? Why?

Any other comments?

End of interview

- Thank you very much for your participation.
- I will disseminate a final report with our findings to you at the end of the project.

Appendix B

Ethics approval



University
of Exeter

Reference Number

M2223-126

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION DISSERTATION ETHICS FORM

| Applicant details | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Student number | 710066638 |
| UoE email address | [REDACTED] |
| Course/Programme | MA Education |
| Name of supervisor | [REDACTED] |

| Duration for which permission is required | | |
|--|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| You should request approval for the entire period of your research activity. The start date should normally be at least two weeks from the date that you submit this form. Students should use the anticipated date of completion of their module as the end date of their work. Please note that <u>retrospective ethical approval will never be given.</u> | | |
| Start date:01/05/2023 | End date:24/07/2023 | Date of application:24/04/2023 |

| Certification for all submissions |
|---|
| I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given in this application and that I undertake in my research to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research. I confirm that if my research should change radically I will complete a further ethics proposal form. [REDACTED] |
| <i>Submission of this ethics proposal form confirms your acceptance of the above.</i> |

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT

| |
|---|
| How do Early Years teachers support the development of narrative competence and creativity in children's oral stories? |
|---|

SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

As a guide – approx. 200 words.

| |
|--|
| <p>Many educationalists draw attention to the under-utilisation of oral storytelling in the contemporary classroom (Bruce, 2020; Gerde et al., 2015; Stadler & Ward, 2005). Equally, the Early Learning Goal for writing within the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (England) gives no importance to oral composition, instead focusing solely on writing recognisable, correctly formed letters, spelling words and writing simple phrases and sentences (Department for Education, 2021). Cremin & Flewitt (2017) identify that the pressure to conform to such statutory requirements risks losing the importance of creativity in story composition that must be fostered through oral storytelling.</p> <p>The purpose of this research, therefore, is to explore how children's creativity and compositional skills are affected by the way in which teacher's develop children's narrative competence via oral storytelling (both retelling familiar stories and</p> |
|--|

inventing and telling their own stories) and to consider the implications for future classroom practice.

A small investigation in 2 Reception classes in a primary school will be undertaken. The study will be conducted over a 4-week period in the summer term of the academic year 2022-23 and will involve 2 teachers and 8 children (4 from each Reception class). Teachers will be asked to engage with the children in oral story-telling and oral story invention activities as part of their daily literacy session. Within the normal class provision, children will have opportunity for independent story invention and oral retelling. The two Reception teachers will be asked to write down an oral story from each child at the end of each of the consecutive four weeks of the study. Each child will have 1:1 time with their familiar teacher each week and will be asked to tell a story. Character props will be available for the child to choose for their story should they wish/need to use this to support them. The teachers are familiar with this approach and understand that their role is to listen and write down verbatim what the child says.

Each teacher will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview towards the end of the study period to share their experience and perceptions of using oral story-telling and oral story invention activities with the children. The design aims to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

- What is the role of the Early Years teacher in supporting children's narrative competence and creativity through oral storytelling?
 - How do teachers perceive their role in supporting children to be storytellers?
 - Does the inclusion of planned opportunities for oral storytelling have an impact on children's narrative competence and creativity? Is so, in what way?

Future classroom practice is likely to be informed by the study.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

Not applicable.

The following sections require an assessment of possible ethical consideration in your research project. If particular sections do not seem relevant to your project please indicate this and clarify why.

RESEARCH METHODS

My research takes a pragmatist approach, recognising the value of both the objective measurement and reason of the positivist approach and the interpretivist recognition of the need to attend to the subjective perceptions of individuals involved the research). I will, therefore, be using a mixed methods approach, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative data will be collected as follows:

- Oral stories from children in the research group will be transcribed and collected at the end of each of the four weeks of the research period. Each child will tell their story to their teacher on a 1:1 basis. These will be written

down by the teacher at the time of telling and each transcript will be identifiable only by a letter and a number so that the children in the study remain anonymous to the researcher. The hard copies of the children's stories will be stored in a locked drawer and destroyed once analysed. Each story will be analysed based on 4 aspects – story conventions (as a marker of narrative knowledge), story event structure (as a marker of coherence), use of conjunctions (as a measure of cohesion) and number of developed ideas. Extracts from the transcribed stories, and any accompanying visual story maps, may be used for illustrative purposes in the dissertation report. Should there be anything in an extract/story map that could identify a child, this will be redacted in the dissertation report.

Qualitative data will be collected as follows:

- One round of semi-structured interviews (no longer than 40 minutes) on a 1:1 basis with each teacher during normal teaching hours. These will be audio recorded and transcribed after the interviews by the researcher, and then use by the researcher for subsequent analysis.
- The interviews will take place after school but during directed hours (as agreed with the Headteacher) in the respective teacher's classroom.
- A proposed proforma for the interviews (including themes and topics) is included as a separate document.
- A thematic analysis will be done in line with the themes in the interview proforma. Teachers will be assured that they will not be identifiable in any extract from an interview transcription used in the dissertation report.

Each data set will be analysed separately but combined at the stage of interpretation.

PARTICIPANTS

2 Reception teachers from a primary school in Northamptonshire. The teachers are known to me in a professional capacity. The school was identified as a host for the study through my work with them and the two teachers were approached to take part as they are the Reception teachers and therefore teach children at the age required for the study.

8 children (4 from each Reception class), balanced for gender across the pupil group. Because the children are very young (4 or 5 years), teachers will be asked to select the sample using assessment data linked to the guidance outlined in Development Matters to guide their choice. Children assessed as attaining at age-related expectation in Speaking & Listening and Communication & Language will be considered for the sample. Once the age-related sample group has been established, 8 children for this sample will be randomly selected.

THE VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

The teachers will receive an Information Sheet about the proposed study outlining what taking part will mean in terms of time and commitment. I will make it clear to them that it is wholly their decision whether or not to participate in the study. They will be given opportunity to ask any questions before and throughout the study period and it will be made clear that participation in the study is entirely voluntary and that they can withdraw at any point during

collection for any or no reason by informing me of their decision by email (on the Information Sheet). Any data collected to this point will be deleted/destroyed. Teachers will be informed that once I have started analysing the data, withdrawal will not be possible. They will be asked to give informed consent to participating in the study and to the data collected being used for the research study.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

None of the participants will have special educational needs or disabilities.

THE INFORMED NATURE OF PARTICIPATION

Following an initial meeting with the Headteacher, I have secured verbal gatekeeper consent for the school to host this study. The Headteacher will be sent a consent form by email along with an Information Sheet with detailed information about what taking part will mean in terms of time and commitment for the teachers involved. This will make clear that the quantitative and qualitative data obtained in the study will not be made available by me to the Headteacher.

Teachers will also be sent, via email, an information sheet/consent form that will clearly outline the study and data to be collected and which will inform fully about what they will be asked to consent to.

Oral storytelling and invention form part of normal whole class teaching within the school as part of the EYFS curriculum for Communication & Language, and Literacy. The children will not be extracted just for the purpose of the research. Collection of the oral stories forms part of normal assessment of attainment. Parents/guardians of the children will receive an information sheet about the proposed study via email and will be asked to consent to their child's anonymised data (including story maps) being used in the research study. Due to the age, and therefore understanding of the children (4-5 years), they will not be asked to give voluntary, informed consent.

ASSESSMENT OF POSSIBLE HARM

There is little likelihood of harm. The following aspects have been built into the research design to minimise any areas that have the potential for harm:

- The teaching and learning activities (including telling a story to their teacher and having this written down) which will yield quantitative data are part of normal classroom practice. There is no requirement for teachers to plan additional activities and no additional time pressures in terms of preparation or delivery of teaching.
- Semi-structured interviews will take place as part of directed hours and will therefore not be an additional time commitment for the teachers.
- The content of interviews is unlikely to cause upset. In order to avoid any potential for teachers to feel their teaching is being 'judged', the researcher will make clear that the core purpose of the study is to explore how teachers are supporting the development of narrative competence and creativity in children's oral stories i.e. it is about what they are doing, not what they are

not doing. However, if the participants feel uncomfortable in answering the questions, they have the right to not answer.

- It will be made clear to the teachers that if, at any point, they need to take a break, the interview will be paused to facilitate this.
- In advance of the interviews, a duty of care towards myself and the teachers has been considered. A check-in/check-out policy (times/location of interviews convenient to the participant and known to the Headteacher) has been adopted to ensure that both researcher and participants are safe. An estimated time for the interviews is included on the information sheet.
- The practice of oral storytelling is familiar to the children. In order for them to feel safe, the study has been designed such that it is their familiar adult in school who will be writing down their stories on a 1:1 basis. This should guard against stress for the children. However, teachers will be clear that should a child display or state that they feel stressed, the story telling should be paused or postponed.

DATA PROTECTION AND STORAGE

Every effort will be made to ensure children's anonymity is protected. Transcripts of stories will be identified to the researcher by letter and number only (e.g. A1, A2 etc.) with letter denoting the participant and number indicating which transcript this is for the participant (each child will have 4 transcripts across the research period). Story maps will be anonymised.

Confidentiality will be assured in the dissertation by referring to the teachers by letter and number only – T1; T2. All reasonable effort will be made to ensure that information in the dissertation does not allow the identification of individuals or the school via name, data or contextual information.

Data gathered and analysed during the research period will be specifically for the purposes of the research study and will not be made available to anyone other than the researcher and the researcher's supervisor.

Electronic data will be stored as password protected files on the University of Exeter OneDrive and anonymised (as identified above) so that the data is secure. No data will be stored on memory sticks or cards. Audio data from the interviews will be recorded on my mobile phone; it will be downloaded from the phone and stored on my computer in a password protected folder and then deleted immediately from the phone's recording device. Hard copy transcripts and signed consent forms will be stored in a locked drawer. Data will be destroyed immediately after the Masters degree has been conferred.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None of the participants will be known to me in anything other than a professional capacity.

Participants will be informed on the information sheet that the research will be submitted only to the University of Exeter as my Masters dissertation. There are no commercial interests, and the research is not funded by anyone.

USER ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

This aim of this study is to inform future classroom practice. Feedback on outcomes from the study will be shared with the participating teachers in a face to face meeting with the researcher, allowing opportunity to discuss and build professional knowledge that may directly impact on the participants' own future practice.

Appendix C

Information sheets



University
of Exeter

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Project

How do Early Years teachers support the development of narrative competence and creativity in children's oral stories?

Researcher name: [REDACTED]

Project Information

Thank you for your interest in this study and for taking the time to consider participating in it. Imaginative play and storytelling are an important part of children's early lives. We know that oral storytelling, in particular, helps young children to make sense of the world around them, and develops the way they think and their imagination. The aim of the study is to improve future classroom practice by exploring how Early Years teachers support children to generate ideas for oral stories and develop the content and structure of their stories.

Your school has agreed to host this project and I would like to invite you to be a part of the study. You have been approached because you teach the children (Reception) to whom this study applies. You will find below details of what taking part in this study will mean for you and the children you teach. You will not receive payment for taking part in this study. The study may provide you with useful insights into the way in which you support children in oral story invention and telling which will allow you to further develop this area of practice. The possible disadvantage of additional workload should not be an issue as this study involves the delivery of oral storytelling and story invention activities as part of normal daily literacy learning within the classroom. You will, however, have opportunity throughout the study period to contact me via my email at the end of this sheet should you feel this is not the case. If, having read the information, you agree to take part, please sign a copy of the consent form and return to the contact provided at the end of this letter.

The study will take place over a 4-week period when participating teachers will be asked to:

- plan and deliver oral storytelling and story invention activities as part of normal daily literacy learning within the classroom;
- listen to and write down the oral stories of 4 children in your class each week (16 in total);
- engage in an interview during week 4 of the study to discuss your experience of the oral storytelling and story invention activities and to share your perception of the teacher's role (no longer than 40 minutes).

Whilst on school premises conducting face-to-face interviews, I will comply fully with the school's Covid 19 precautionary measures.

How will my information be kept confidential?

The school and its location will not be identified in the study.

The children in the study will not be identifiable to the researcher. Each participating child will have one oral story transcribed each week which will provide data for the researcher to analyse. Transcripts of stories will be identified to the researcher by letter and number only (e.g. A1, A2 etc.) Each child will be assigned their own letter and the number will indicate which transcript this is for the child.

You will be identifiable to the researcher as they will be taking part in face-to-face interviews. However, confidentiality will be assured in the study write-up by referring to the participating teachers as T1 and T2. The interviews will be recorded to allow the researcher to transcribe what is said after the interviews are completed. Audio data from the interviews will be downloaded from the recording device within 3 days of the interviews and deleted immediately from the recording device.

The sponsor for this study is the University of Exeter. The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing informationgovernance@exeter.ac.uk or at <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/ig/>.

All data will be stored electronically on The University of Exeter One Drive in password protected files. All data will be permanently deleted immediately after the Masters degree has been awarded.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

You can stop taking part at any time without having to give a reason up to the point where all data has been collected and has been analysed. At this point it would be difficult to separate individual contributions in order to remove them. However, please be assured, as detailed above, that you will not be identifiable in the study write-up.

What will happen to the results of this study?

This research study will be submitted for my Masters dissertation only.

Who has reviewed this study?

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter (Reference Number M2223-126).

Contact for any questions or request regarding your participation in this research

In the event of queries or requests you may contact me using the following contact information.

Please email [REDACTED]

To contact [REDACTED], the University tutor supervising this dissertation, please email [REDACTED]

To contact the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee please email fhass-ethics@exeter.ac.uk

You can also contact the University Research Ethics and Governance Team

please email cgr-reg@exeter.ac.uk,

Thank you for your interest in this project.



Parent/ Caregiver Information Sheet and Consent Form

Title of Project

How do Early Years teachers support the development of narrative competence and creativity in children’s oral stories?

Researcher name: [REDACTED]

Project Information

Your child’s school have agreed to take part in my Masters dissertation research project. The sponsor for this study is the University of Exeter.

Imaginative play and storytelling are an important part of children’s early lives. We know that oral storytelling, in particular, helps young children to make sense of the world around them, and develops the way they think and their imagination.

Oral storytelling and story invention are part of your child’s normal literacy lessons. Children are already used to telling their stories to the class teacher and having these written down. In this study, the individual stories of a group of 8 children, collected over a 4-week period, will be analysed by the researcher. Your child’s class teacher would like your child’s stories to be part of the data collected.

The school and its location will not be identified in the study.

The data collected will be the children’s stories, told to their teacher and written down. These will be identified to the researcher by letter and number only (e.g. A1, A2 etc.). Each child will be assigned their own letter and the number will indicate which story this is for the child. In this way, your child’s identity will not be known to the researcher. An analysis of your child’s stories and possibly short extracts from the stories will be included in the dissertation report but your child will not be identifiable in either the analysis or extracts. Additionally, anonymised story maps that may be drawn by your child may be included in the dissertation report.

All data (the written down stories) will be stored electronically on the University of Exeter One Drive in password protected files. All data will be permanently deleted immediately after the Masters degree has been awarded.

Please initial box

Consent

- 1. I confirm that I have read the above project information dated 21.4.23 (version 1.3).
- 2. I give consent for my child’s data to be used for the purposes of this research study.
- 3. I understand that I can withdraw consent for my child’s data to be used without giving any reason at any point before the data has been collected and analysed.

| |
|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of parent/caregiver

Date

Signature

Name of researcher taking consent

Date

Signature



Headteacher Information Sheet

Title of Project

How do Early Years teachers support the development of narrative competence and creativity in children's oral stories?

Researcher name: [REDACTED]

Project Information

Thank you for agreeing to host this project. Imaginative play and storytelling are an important part of children's early lives. We know that oral storytelling, in particular, helps young children to make sense of the world around them, and develops the way they think and their imagination. The aim of the study is to improve future classroom practice by exploring how Early Years teachers support children to generate ideas for oral stories and develop the content and structure of their stories.

Below are details of what taking part in this study will mean for participating teachers and the children they teach.

The study will take place over a 4-week period when participating teachers will be asked to:

- plan and deliver oral storytelling and story invention activities as part of normal daily literacy learning within the classroom;
- listen to and transcribe the oral stories of 4 children in your class each week (16 in total);
- engage in an interview during week 4 of the study to discuss your experience of the oral storytelling and story invention activities and to share your perception of the teacher's role (no longer than 40 minutes).

Whilst on school premises conducting face-to-face interviews, the researcher will comply fully with the school's Covid 19 precautionary measures.

How will my information be kept confidential?

The school and its location will not be identified in the study.

The children in the study will not be identifiable to the researcher. Each participating child will have one oral story transcribed each week which will provide data for the researcher to analyse. Transcripts of stories will be identified to the researcher by letter and number only (e.g. A1, A2 etc.) Each child will be assigned their own letter and the number will indicate which transcript this is for the child.

Participating teachers will be identifiable to the researcher as they will be taking part in face-to-face interviews. However, confidentiality will be assured in the study write-up by referring to the participating teachers as T1 and T2. The interviews will be recorded to allow the researcher to transcribe what is said after the interviews are completed. Audio data from the interviews will be downloaded from the recording device within 3 days of the interviews and deleted immediately from the recording device.

All data will be stored electronically on Dropbox in password protected files. The Dropbox file will be permanently deleted immediately after the Masters degree has been awarded. The data obtained in this research study (transcripts of children's oral stories and interviews with the teachers) will not be made available to you by the researcher. The sponsor for this study is the University of Exeter. The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing informationgovernance@exeter.ac.uk or at <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/ig/>.

Teachers will be informed that they can stop taking part at any time without having to give a reason up to the point where all data has been collected and has been analysed. At this point it would be difficult to separate individual contributions in order to remove them.

What will happen to the results of this study?

This research study will be submitted for the researcher's Masters dissertation only.

Who has reviewed this study?

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter (Reference Number M2223- 126).

Contact for any questions or request regarding your participation in this research

In the event of queries or requests you may contact me using the following contact information.

Please email [REDACTED]

To contact [REDACTED], the University tutor supervising this dissertation, please email [REDACTED]

To contact the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee please email fhass-ethics@exeter.ac.uk

You can also contact the University Research Ethics and Governance Team please email cgr-reg@exeter.ac.uk,

Thank you for your interest in this project.

Appendix D

Consent form



University
of Exeter

Participant Identification Number:

CONSENT FORM

Teachers

Title of Project

How do Early Years teachers support the development of narrative competence and creativity in children's oral stories?

Researcher name: Jane Ralphs

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated 21.4.23 (version no. 1.3) for the above project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time up to the point analysis of data has begun without giving any reason.
3. I understand that participation will involve the usual planning and delivery of activities, to support children in my class with oral storytelling and story invention, including transcribing the oral stories of participating children each week of the 4-week study, and participating in one semi-structured interview.
4. I understand that taking part involves audio recordings of the interview which will be transcribed and analysed for the purposes of this dissertation.
5. I agree to take part in the above project.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of researcher
taking consent

Date

Signature

When completed: 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher/project file

Appendix E

Examples of children's stories

Child A Story three

Once upon a time there was a black and pink octopus who lived by the sea.
One sunny day he found a round ball and he played with it.
Unfortunately the ball broke so he asked the witch to help.
Luckily the witch fixed the ball.
Then they played with the ball together.

Child C Story one

Once upon a time there was a bear who lived in the forest.
One sunny morning he was sad because he couldn't find a friend to play with.
Unfortunately his friends were at the park.
Luckily the bee buzzed past and grabbed his hand and buzzed him to the park.
Finally they played on the slide and they lived happily ever after,

Child E Story two

Once upon a time there was a good wizard who lived in a house.
One day he wanted to go to the park with his football.
Unfortunately he had no one to play with.
Then he met a stripy zebra and the wizard said "Would you like to play with me" and the zebra said "Yes" and they lived happily ever after.

Child B Story four

Once upon a time there was an octopus who lost his mummy and he tried to look for her but he couldn't find her anywhere.
Unfortunately he couldn't find a friend to help him but then he saw a seal and so he asked seal to help him and he said "Yes I will help you."
Luckily they went to find his mummy and they found her and they lived happily ever after.

Appendix F

Story conventions

KEY: TO = temporal opening; C/SI = character/setting information; SSI = scene setting information; E = ending

| Chi Id | Story 1 | | | | Story 2 | | | | Story 3 | | | | Story 4 | | | | TOT AL OUT OF 16 |
|--------|---------|-------|------|---|---------|-------|------|---|---------|-------|------|---|---------|-------|------|---|------------------|
| | T O | C/ SI | S SI | E | T O | C/ SI | S SI | E | T O | C/ SI | S SI | E | T O | C/ SI | S SI | E | |
| A | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | ABSENT | | | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 11 |
| B | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 15 |
| C | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 15 |
| D | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 16 |
| E | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 16 |
| F | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 16 |
| G | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 16 |
| H | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 15 |

STORY 1: TO = 8; C/S1 – 8; SS1 = 7; E = 8

STORY 2: TO = 7; C/S1 – 7; SS1 = 7; E = 7

STORY 3: TO = 8; C/S1 – 8; SS1 = 8; E = 6

STORY 4: TO = 8; C/S1 – 8; SS1 = 8; E = 7

Appendix G

Child H story with character information but limited setting information

Once upon a time there was a friendly bear called Brownie.

One sunny day Brownie wanted to see his friends called Poppy and Buzzy.

Unfortunately Brownie didn't know where he was going.

Luckily Max the tiger put his torch on and he helped Brownie to see.

Finally he found his friends and they all lived happily ever after.

Appendix H

Child D story with a stronger ending

Once upon a time there was a seahorse who lived in a bad shark's tummy.

One sunny day an owl was flying through the morning and saw a shape like a seahorse on the shark's tummy.

Unfortunately the owl couldn't help him and flew away.

Luckily there was a girl who was flying in a balloon and she saw a shape of a seahorse on the shark's tummy.

The next day it was bright and sunny. She got out of the balloon and went into the water.

The seahorse had jumped out of the shark's mouth.

Finally the seahorse brushed the girl's hair and they lived happily ever after swimming in the water.

Child F story with a weaker ending

Once upon a time there was a stripy zebra and he lived in the zoo.

So he decided to walk to find his friends.

Unfortunately he didn't know where to go. So he decided to find a friend that could help him.

A ball came along and helped him to find his way to his friend's house and the wizard was at his house and they played at the park together.

My story is over.

Appendix I

Story event structure

KEY: NS = non-story; IS = intermediate story; CS = complete story

| Child | Story 1 | | | Story 2 | | | Story 3 | | | Story 4 | | | TOTAL out of 8 |
|----------|---------|----|----|---------|----|----|---------|----|----|---------|----|----|-------------------|
| | NS | IS | CS | NS | IS | CS | NS | IS | CS | NS | IS | CS | |
| A | | X | | ABSENT | | | | | X | | | X | 5 |
| B | | X | | | X | | | | X | | | X | 6 |
| C | | | X | | X | | | X | | | | X | 6 |
| D | | X | | | X | | | X | | | | X | 5 |
| E | | X | | | X | | | | X | | X | | 5 |
| F | | X | | | X | | | X | | | | X | 5 |
| G | | X | | | X | | | X | | | X | | 4 |
| H | | X | | | X | | | | X | | X | | 5 |

STORY 1: NS – 0; IS – 7; CS - 1

STORY 2: NS – 0; IS – 7; CS – 0

STORY 3: NS – 0; IS – 4; CS - 4

STORY 4: NS – 0; IS – 3; CS – 5

Appendix J

Use of connectives

KEY: I = independent; T = temporal; D = dependent

| Child | Story 1 | | | | Story 2 | | | | Story 3 | | | | Story 4 | | | |
|----------|------------------------|--------------------------|----|----|------------------------|--------------------------|----|----|------------------------|--------------------------|----|----|------------------------|--------------------------|----|----|
| | Number of propositions | Interclausal connectives | | | Number of propositions | Interclausal connectives | | | Number of propositions | Interclausal connectives | | | Number of propositions | Interclausal connectives | | |
| | | I | T | D | | I | T | D | | I | T | D | | I | T | D |
| A | 6 | 3 | 0 | 0 | ABSENT | | | | 8 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| | Proportion (%) | 100 | 0 | 0 | | | | | Proportion (%) | 67 | 33 | 0 | Proportion (%) | 60 | 0 | 40 |
| B | 8 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 10 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 11 | 6 | 1 | 3 |
| | Proportion (%) | 50 | 50 | 0 | Proportion (%) | 57 | 14 | 29 | Proportion (%) | 86 | 0 | 14 | Proportion (%) | 60 | 10 | 30 |
| C | 10 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 12 | 8 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 11 | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| | Proportion (%) | 83 | 0 | 17 | Proportion (%) | 89 | 0 | 11 | Proportion (%) | 33 | 0 | 67 | Proportion (%) | 75 | 25 | 0 |
| D | 7 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 11 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | Proportion (%) | 75 | 0 | 25 | Proportion (%) | 50 | 50 | 0 | Proportion (%) | 50 | 25 | 25 | Proportion (%) | 33 | 33 | 33 |
| E | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 10 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 1 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------|----------------|-----|----|---|----------------|-----|----|----|----------------|-----|----|----|----------------|----|----|----|
| | Proportion (%) | 100 | 0 | 0 | Proportion (%) | 80 | 20 | 0 | Proportion (%) | 100 | 0 | 0 | Proportion (%) | 75 | 0 | 25 |
| F | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 15 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | Proportion (%) | 100 | 0 | 0 | Proportion (%) | 80 | 0 | 20 | Proportion (%) | 50 | 0 | 50 | Proportion (%) | 33 | 33 | 33 |
| G | 10 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 15 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| | Proportion (%) | 80 | 20 | 0 | Proportion (%) | 36 | 55 | 9 | Proportion (%) | 100 | 0 | 0 | Proportion (%) | 43 | 14 | 43 |
| H | 7 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 9 | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| | Proportion (%) | 100 | 0 | 0 | Proportion (%) | 100 | 0 | 0 | Proportion (%) | 88 | 12 | 0 | Proportion (%) | 75 | 0 | 25 |

Total inter-clausal connectives – 155. Independent = 103; Temporal = 22; Dependent = 30

Proportion of each type of inter-clausal connectives (as a proportion of all linked clauses):

Independent: 67%
Temporal: 14%
Dependent: 19%

Story 1 – 60 propositions; 24 with inter-clausal links = 40%
Story 2 – 69 propositions; 40 with inter-clausal links = 58%
Story 3 – 78 propositions; 38 with inter-clausal links = 49%
Story 4 – 87 propositions; 53 with inter-clausal links = 61%

Appendix K

Child G story containing a high number of temporal inter-clausal connectives (highlighted)

Once upon a time there was a wizard what liked to do magic potions. **Then** he went to his friend's house but there was river to get past. And **then** he put, he put his wellie boots on. He did a magic potion that gives him wellies and he put them on.

Then he went into the river and he ran and ran until he got to zebra's house.

Unfortunately she was at work. **Then** he went to zebra's work and she went home again.

Then they were making magic potions. **After** the magic potions they played football and lego and potions.

The end.

Appendix L

Example teacher interview transcript

INTERVIEWER

Okay, [name], thank you ever so much for agreeing to participate. What I do need to say right at the outset is that this is about your point of view, your observations, your thoughts. It's not about what you think I want to hear or don't want to hear - I'm really interested to listen to what you have to say.

T1

That's fine

INTERVIEWER

So first of all, can you talk to me about the sorts of storytelling or story invention activities that the children have been doing?

T1

Okay, so in class, we have been using the story bags to help us with our story invention, which has tended to be a whole class situation. In the story bags, we would have the story rope. We've had story maps, and the sentence starters for the children, and then, ummm, two or three characters and maybe a prop that the children could use, yeah. We've tried to vary that quite a lot. Mix them up. So characters necessarily wouldn't go together, ummm, to really get the imagination going. Sometimes we've used all the characters, yeah, sometimes just use one because they've wanted to go on a different path with their story, which is fine.

In the provision, we have had the story plan frameworks for the children to use, puppets, story spoons, ummm, little small world kinds of characters, to help fire their imagination and get into story, ummm, in their own kind of creative way. We've also been using story books, sequencing stories, a lot of reading. Like, the Hungry Caterpillar recently. Well, we've been sequencing the story, dressing up and roleplaying. So it's a big variety of things.

INTERVIEWER

If you were to say what aspects of this lovely range of things have been particularly beneficial, what would that be?

T1

I think the story bags as they have been the big focus and hugely beneficial to the children. They get really excited when you say "It's story time" and then we get the story bag out. And a couple of the children have been very brave last week and have wanted to play with them independently with their friends, making their little stories, yeah, and have moved to having a go at writing their story down. You know, like we've modelled it to the children. So that's really nice.

They seem to just get really excited about it. Who's in the bag? Who have we got? Creating that kind of, ummm, atmosphere. And you can hear it even when they haven't got the story bag and they're playing with the roleplay. You can hear that, actually, it's starting to have a bit of an effect. So I think for us, that's been the biggest, most beneficial change that we've made. I think focusing on it regularly, has just got them engaged and excited and, yeah, curious about it and about stories.

INTERVIEWER

So if we think more specifically now about your modelling of storytelling. Can you tell me about the aspects of your modelling that you feel were most beneficial in supporting the children then to make up their own stories?

T1

Okay, I think modelling to the children, how to set it out, ummm, how to start their sentences. So we started with the back to front 'S'. Initially, it was very much structured - Once upon a time, One sunny day. Then, you know, Unfortunately, Luckily, and Finally. We kept to that for the first little while and then what we wanted to do was kind of give the children options, different sentence starters, sticking with the five sentence structure, but just changing up a little bit. Because what we felt when they recorded their first story, was it was very much like the basic structure. But we wanted to vary it a little bit. We don't want, you know, four weeks of the same sentence starters. So I think modelling it to the children and getting them engaged was really important. So asking them for their ideas. That's increased over the time, and they've got more ideas that they can bring to the table. So we started off with modelling on the 'S plan and then went to the five sentences sort of across the page as you would write them. Just to give them different ways of doing it.

INTERVIEWER

What impact do you think that had?

T1

I think the S plan was very much kind of the starting point. The S plan helped them to explore the story language that they could use independently in the provision, in their play. With a sentence structure, I think it gives them clarity for setting it out when they coming to writing it down. You could see they're starting to think about the actual structure of the sentences and how that would look on a page. So I think to begin with, especially for the less confident, this plan was a good starting point. And then I think we found that some children got the confidence to go and now write it into the sentence structure.

INTERVIEWER

So what I'm hearing is that your S shape plan was really good at getting the children ready for telling their stories, but moving towards the more first sentence, next sentence kind of structure supported their writing. Is that right?

T1

Yes, that's right.

INTERVIEWER

So, thinking now about helping children to generate ideas for their own stories. What are your thoughts about how teacher modelling supported that?

T1

I think having the range of characters in the story bag when we were modelling to the children was a really good starting point. Ummm, especially because I think children, not all children, but some children struggle with the idea generating and I think what we've noticed is the confident ones have got loads of ideas, very imaginative and creative, but some children still need a bit of support with the thinking of the characters.

With the children that we've focused on, I think their independence has grown with that so they're a bit more creative. I think it's good that we don't necessarily give them characters that are from the same sort of setting. They get a variety and actually, it doesn't have to be an obvious story. See what the characters are and where that takes the story. You can mix it up and that gives them that creativity, gives them the imagination, ummm, the freedom to kind of go where they want to go with it. So I think for some children they've needed the characters in the story bag but as its progressed, we've seen that actually they're starting to think of their own characters. Maybe they just want the main character from the story bag, and then one of their own characters, maybe they want two or three characters, depending on where the story's going. It's helping them gain a little bit more ownership over where they want the story to go. I think we've seen an increase in that as we've gone on. Yeah, very much. It was like, and I think for the adults as well, let's see what we've got in the bag. But now what we're noticing, we might get one or two characters out of the bag, but actually, they want to go somewhere else with the story. So, that's great.

INTERVIEWER

So what I'm hearing is that having the resources initially to support was the aspect that supported the most, that had the most impact?

T1

Yes, that's right. I think for the teachers as well.

INTERVIEWER

Tell me a bit more about that.

T1

It's just having the confidence for ourselves. I mean, I was really pleased with some of the stories we were creating last week. Really creative, you know, just kind of different. But that starting point just gave us teachers confidence to begin with initially.

And then I think with the children we've kind of learned to be a little bit more loose, not restricted by what's in the bag. Being a bit more imaginative with it a little bit.

INTERVIEWER

So let's think now about another aspect that I'm interested in which is about supporting their composition. What are your thoughts again, around how teacher modelling supported that?

T1

I think, talking to children very much about their writing and the structure of a sentence - you know, what's needed at the beginning, what do you need at the end- talking about how the character might be feeling or what the character might be doing or where character might live. I think it's about modelling but using their ideas. That has given them confidence and hopefully the encouragement to maybe go and have a go for themselves. Showing them actually, they can do it, but not being constrained by the mechanics, right? So they can make up a story and they can orally retell it, but then they haven't necessarily got to go and write it down. We can do that for them. Which is important, isn't it, at this stage, I think? For some of the children. Obviously, we've got some children who are ready for that next step, and we'll encourage them to have a go. But even if the children can't, or don't feel confident to go and write it, they're still getting their ideas, and that is all being valued. That's coming across really strongly, that sense of valuing what they're giving us rather than the value being in the words they can actually put on the page. The value is in the story that they have to tell. We've tried really hard to work on choices. So if, say, we've got an octopus, ummm, where could he live? And then we've taken a few ideas before we talk about it and decide on which one we're going to go with so that everybody is getting a chance to have a go and share their idea. It's let us focus on choosing some of the children that are a little bit less confident at times, you know, some that are really confident and kind of trying to give everybody a bit of a chance.

INTERVIEWER

That sounds great. So, you've shared a lot of direct teaching opportunities that have been beneficial. Was there any aspect of direct teaching that you think had minimal impact?

T1

No, I think it's, ummm, evolved. I think where we were at the beginning of the project, we wanted to make sure we were doing the right thing for the children. But I think actually, I can see over the over the few weeks we've been doing it, it's kind of changed. Yeah, there's maybe things that I would change a bit now. The sentence starters. I think that was a good place to start with the five core sentence starters but we've found now that we need to mix it up a little bit. But I think where we started was a good place. So definitely there isn't anything that I wouldn't do. I certainly do think that going forward into September, this is something that we will do. Yeah, in the first term, daily, because I think we have seen such a benefit in their writing.

INTERVIEWER

What I'm hearing is that structure was very supportive in the first instance but there comes a point where you actually need to take the reins off?

T1

Yes, yeah. And release them, ummm, because it can become restrictive. And it'd be really interesting to maybe follow up with these children next year and see what impact it's had on their writing and on them as writers.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think there were any differences in children's response when you were modelling and involving them and when they were story telling independently?

T1

I suppose for some children having an adult modelling meant they were a bit more confident to have their own ideas. I guess, when they are making up their own story, they're under pressure a little bit more to think of their ideas.

In the whole class shared story, if they haven't got any ideas, - maybe they've got a main character idea, but they don't know, say, where that person, that character might live - they can bounce off each other. And then we're there as facilitators to kind of help choose the plot and think about where the story is going. Whereas if they're doing this independently in the setting, they're kind of, ummm, on their own. Once you start them by modelling it, they really flourish. I think the children that we focused on were quite competent in thinking about their own idea, but you know, still relying on the props and what they've seen, the scaffold in the modelling.

INTERVIEWER

So let's turn our attention now to thinking about the children making up their own story. Can you talk about what you've noticed over the four-week study period – firstly about whether creativity developed over the four weeks

T1

I think with the children I looked at, they're quite creative children. They were quite creative at the beginning, but I think what has happened is that now what they have is more structured ideas that fit coherently together. For example, "The dog had come in wondering about a dog who went to the dentist and he met the cat and then they played together went home". Now what we get is more detail in there, longer sentences. When you read their story and think about the composition of the sentences and the detail that they've put in so creatively, I think they've developed because we've shown them that actually, your story can be whatever you want it to be. But then I also think that maybe we've just helped them hone their ideas a little bit more and focus it and give it a bit more kind of coherence and structure.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think the modelling supported this?

T1

I think so because we're modelling it to them. And as we're modelling we're sort of thinking aloud. "Oh, okay, so in the beginning of the story, the tiger was feeling sad, because he'd got a sore tooth or something. How are we going to now put that into the end so it kind of matches and the problem is solved". So I think the modelling has helped the children sort of think about how everything builds and fits in the story.

INTERVIEWER

So, the way that you are modelling supported changed over the period of time? Tell me a bit more about that.

T1

When we were modelling, very much we were thinking about the sentence structure. So we started off with the initial five sentences, keeping it quite simple. Then we kind of moved to putting in conjunctions, 'so', 'but' and actually in their writing, you can see that some of them are starting to use that. Their sentences seem much deeper. More interesting, writing a bit more detail. And I think it's about modelling that thought process as we're writing it. So "Oh, okay, we've got the dog that went to the dentist. Why was he feeling sad? Because he had a sore tooth, right?" So we're thinking in our heads then thinking out loud and modelling it to the children so that hopefully, when they're retelling or writing down, they're having those sort of thoughts in their head. Okay, so my character was feeling hungry. So what's he going to do? So they're thinking about where the story's going.

INTERVIEWER

So I'm hearing that as well as you modelling the story process, actually modelling the thought behind it has been really important?

T1

Yes. Definitely.

INTERVIEWER

What are your observations as to what's happened with children's composition?

T1

So with a couple of the children at the very beginning, we might have got, ummm, 'Once upon a time there was a cat'. Now what we're seeing is "Once upon a time there was a cat **who** was feeling sad. She lived in a cottage". What I've also tried to do, and perhaps only one of my children has picked this up, is think about an adjective to describe the character. So we've moved from the very simple into making it a bit more meaty if you like. So this story character might be a zebra. What does he look like? Are his stripes black and white or might they be sparkly or shiny? So one of my children has written 'Once upon a time there was a cute puppy'.

Only one of them, but I think that's something that we need to take forward over the next few weeks. That's something we can start to work on. "Right, so once upon a time there was a cute puppy **who** lived in a small cottage in the dark woods". So pulling in those adjectives to describe, thinking about describing what the character might look like or how they might feel. So bringing that into their sentences to make them more complex, extending using conjunctions.

I think we've needed to vary the sentence starters. So instead of 'Once upon a time', 'One sunny day', it might be 'One cloudy day', 'One rainy day' or it could be 'The next day'. So, we need to experiment now they've got quite good understanding of the purpose of those starters. So what we're going to do in September is make sure we have those sentence starters available throughout the provision so they can independently have some small world or puppets, or whatever they want, and tell their stories. So that's something we will take forward next year, from the get go.

INTERVIEWER

Is there anything else you want to tell me about?

T1

I think creating that excitement has been great. Creating the love of "let's all get together. What have we got in the bag? What's this? It's a sparkly potion bottle". So I think it's just about, ummm, being enthusiastic and creating that awe and wonder. It will hopefully have helped them, especially going forward into Year 1, fired up a little bit about story. One thing I haven't said is that we started to think, about some of the stories, that we're going a bit down the same sort of route. For example, the character has been, say, Bob. They're feeling sad because they were lonely and didn't have anyone to play with. We're now saying to the children "Okay, we had that yesterday. Let's think of something else. So they're not looking for a friend all the time". We had one last week that was a bit crazy. I had a character who had found a gold shiny coin but it was stuck under a bush. And luckily, they met an octopus who managed to get it with his tentacle. So we're then asking "What could the main character say to the octopus? Please can you help me with adding that in?" So we've got a little bit of speech, and one or two of them have started to put that in which is nice, really nice. It's something we've been very conscious of and we've been modelling what they say, how they're going to feel at the end when they've got their gold coin, what they're going to do with that - they might go to the shop and buy some ice cream and some apples or something. So how are the characters going to interact with each other?

INTERVIEWER

So that sounds to me, from what I'm hearing, that there are three aspects that you've been developing. The modelling of the process of being a storyteller, the thought process of a storyteller but then there's that third element of just the sheer joy of being a storyteller.

T1

Yes, those things have been really important. I think that it's been good for the children who don't feel competent, ummm, about the mechanics of writing the sentence. Doesn't matter. Even if you can't write, you know, a coherent sentence, you've got the ideas. Don't let the actual mechanics stop you from being a storyteller or story writer.

And I think that by just enjoying creating stories together will hopefully, going forward, when they come to write stories, they'll see it as a positive experience.

INTERVIEWER

Absolutely. It certainly sounds that way. So, final thing to talk about, [name], is thinking about the future. Are there any things that you would you keep doing, possibly develop? And are there any things that you would stop doing?

T1

I don't think there's anything we'd stop doing. There's definitely things that I think we will take forward earlier in September with the new children. The first term when we're doing our "five stories in five weeks", we're going to do a story bag every day. And that will be something that continues, whether it's a teacher modelling it or it's a small group thing in a setting that might be adult initiated. I think what we'll do is we'll mix it up a little bit sooner and experiment with a different sentence starters and things. I think we'll have more story mapping opportunities in the setting, ummm, more focused opportunities for the children to be more independent in their storytelling, from an earlier point in the year than we have done this year. I don't think there's anything we'd stop but I think there's definitely a lot we can go forward with and develop.

INTERVIEWER

Great. So that's all my questions. Is there anything else you wanted to share with me?

T1

One thing is I think it would be really interesting to see where these 8 children are next year. See how their stories have developed once they begin to get more confident with writing them down. Actually, we've decided we will continue with the story bags until the end of the term daily for all the children because they just love it so much. I think it'll be interesting to see next year how that whole process develops when you start it earlier. I think we'll probably release them, give them more freedom in their stories a lot sooner

INTERVIEWER

Well, [name], thank you very much. It's been massively helpful for me.

T1

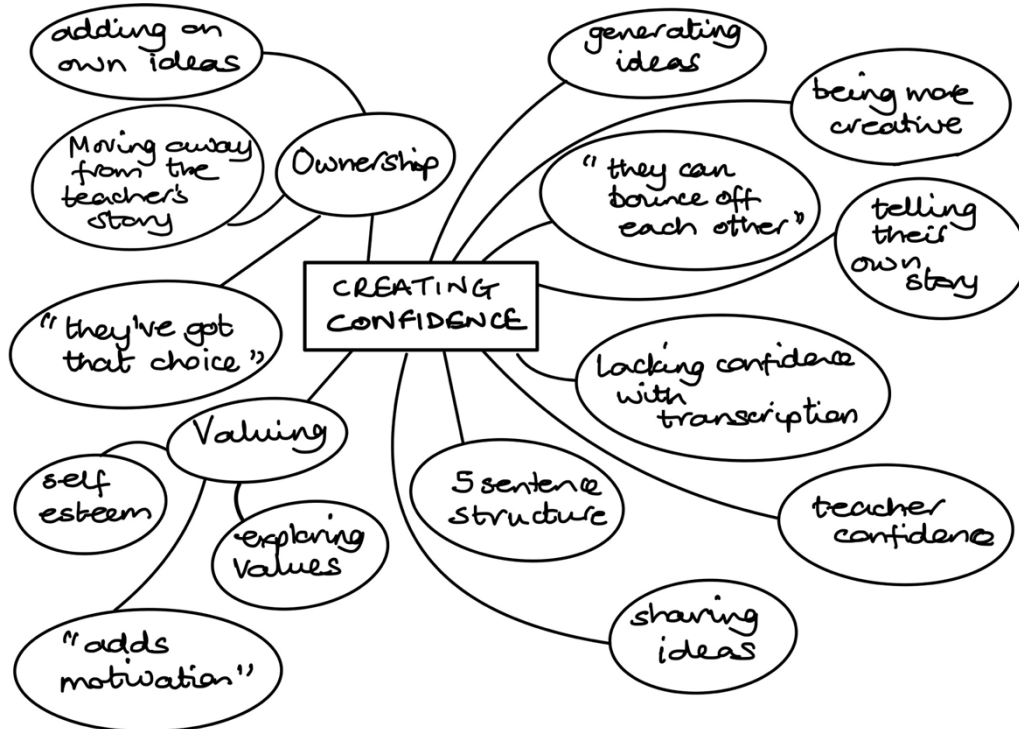
Well it's been really interesting for us as well. Just being able to sit and have a look at their all stories from, you know, the first week to now. You can see the little small tweaks that are happening and changes that are happening and I think that's really good.

INTERVIEWER

That's great. Well, I will send you a copy of the final research paper once it's written. Many thanks again, [name].

Appendix M

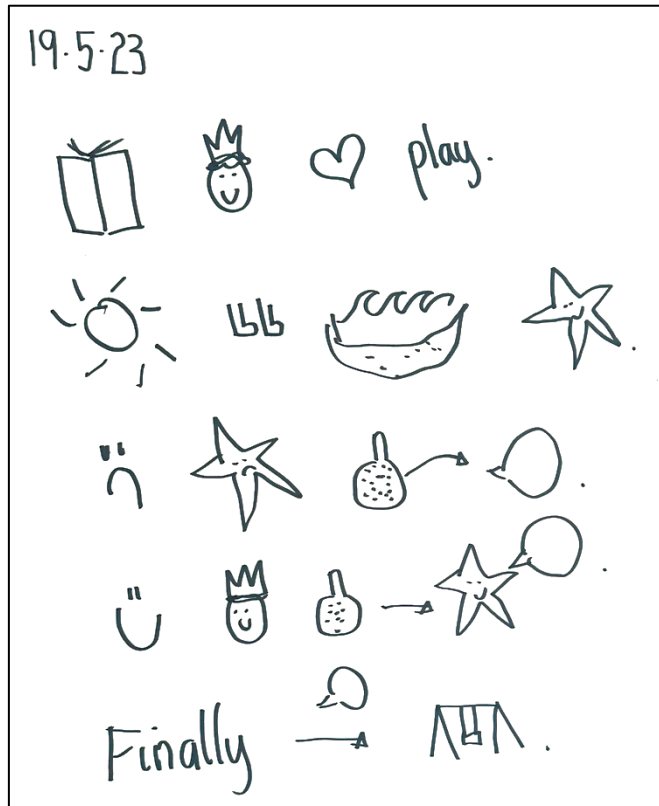
Coding within the three main themes in qualitative analysis





Appendix N

Examples of teacher story maps



Appendix O

Example of a story bag



Appendix P

Examples of children's story maps

