

Role-play area
increase childrens
oral language



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My interest for this research stemmed from my passion for drama and my belief that it can enhance children's learning experience. However, within the research school, teachers planned collaboratively and the use of drama did not suit lessons planned. This led to a developing interest in children's play within the role-play area and the potential it had in enabling children to acquire language.

The potential of the role-play corner is supported by Sylva et al (1980) who believe that the richest conversations within the Foundation classroom occur within the home corner. During my research I found that I strongly agreed with Moyles' (2005) opinion that play is not employed within the primary classroom despite recommendations that this should be the case due to the range of potential it provides. Before changes were made to the role-play area during the research I felt that children were not using the area to its full potential and the research carried out aimed to resolve this by encouraging teachers to use this area in enhancing children's learning.

Therefore, the research carried out aimed to show the important role the role-play area plays within primary education and enabling children to acquire oral language. The study further aims to bring to light elements within the role-play area that will enhance children's experience within the role-play area and ensure they are engaging with new vocabulary.

The study was based in a large school with 300 children on roll and 30 teaching staff in Oxfordshire. The research was carried out in a mixed Year 1 and 2 class which consisted of 30 children for a period of five weeks.

The following chapter aims to explore previous research within the areas of language acquisition and how the role-play area can enhance children's language acquisition.

Literature Review

2. 1 Looking at language acquisition

Language acquisition occurs as children learn a language and outlines the stages they progress through to achieve speech (Clark 2009). The first stage looks at sounds, words, meanings and construction which moves onto knowing when and where to use language and incorporating it into everyday life (Clark 2009). There are three main theories that look at how children acquire their language skills and at what age this starts to develop. The Behaviourist view states that children develop language skills through imitating their parents and later reinforce these skills (Eyres 2007). Nativists believe that children find language to be instinctual as children often hear incomplete sentences as they grow up and impose structures they have overheard on their own speech (Eyres 2007). Chomsky (cited in Wilson 2008) believes that children have a Language Acquisition Device that refers to an area of the brain which allows for children to learn and use language from a young age. Chomsky agrees with the Nativist theory in that children make use of rules they overhear in adult speech within the first few years of life and therefore their ideas on language structures constantly change and adapt to suit a more mature view of language grammar (Wilson 2008).

The third theory about language acquisition is that of Interactionalists. They argue that children learn from the community around them and that babies

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start to pick up conventions of communication and their learning is developed through encouragement by adults, lending their support and interpreting sounds (Eyres 2007). However, other research suggests that infants are pushed to learn a language in order to share meaning and communicate with those around them and relationships with their carers engages them in a world of a specific language (Whitehead 2007).

Brumfit (1984) states that there is a lot of research that was carried out on acquiring language but it is important to note that it is impossible to be able to isolate children's language experiences from processes of interaction in their early years. Wells (1979) stands out for researching language acquisition and examines how adults support and assist children in their conversations by expanding on their contribution. Although this research is dated, the significance it still holds in this area should be noted as it the theories are commented on and developed by Wilson (2008) who states that Wells' research suggests that children benefit mostly from one-to-one discussions with adults about topics that concern and interest them and the quantity of language experience children have is crucial to their language development.

Vygotsky and Bruner (cited in Wilson 2008) believe that adults and older children play an important role in aiding young children's language development. They further argue that children need first-hand experience with language through small group or one-to-one interactions with adults and engaging in talk about shared experiences and talking for a variety of purposes (Wilson 2008).

Goodwin (2005) believes that speaking and listening opportunities are essential aspects within the Early Years and this is clearly shown throughout the strands of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (DCSF 2008). Sylva et al (1980) argue that the richest conversations within Foundation classrooms occur in the home corner. Moyles (2005) believes that although play has mainly been used as a teaching strategy in the Early Years, recommendations have been made about implementing it into Key Stage One and Two classrooms due to the worth it holds for a wider age range. Some schools and teachers have taken this advice and set up a 'transitional classroom' which integrates the Early Years approach with traditional classroom practice (Harris 2003).

2. 2 Using the role-play area to develop children's oral language acquisition

Children require first-hand experiences of language when acquiring language through experiences with their peers and adults in different situations (Vygotsky and Bruner cited in Wilson 2008). Goodwin (2005) writes that watching through watching their peers, children can observe different models of language which they can implement on their own. Although this research relates to the opportunity to critically observe drama performances, it lends itself to the idea of children experiencing new language through their peers.

During pretend play, children use their real life and imaginary experiences as a basis for their language and learning, while starting at their own level (Moyles 1989). This is further supported by McArthur (1983) who believes experiences within language classrooms should relate to real-life situations

that occur beyond the classroom walls. The use of pretend play within the role play area further develops language use as it encourages expressive speech to occur as objects may take on a different role during play and these ideas need to be made clear to all participants of play (Marjanovic-Umek and Lesnik-Musek 2001).

Experiences within the role play area further provide meaningful contexts for children by letting them use language in ways they can identify, respond and learn from as they become active and interactive users of language (Clipson-Boyles 1998). Within the role-play area this often occurs through children pretending to be adults and this enables them to experience situations from a new perspective (Clipson-Boyles 1998). When children take on these roles they often imitate adult speech patterns (Tassoni and Husker 2005) and this argument is further developed by Andersen (1990) who states that adult language features can be clearly identified when children start to imitate adults around them. Through this experience children assimilate new vocabulary through portraying different roles (Tassoni and Husker 2005), as well as developing the social skills required to play these roles (Clipson-Boyles 1998).

Due to this, teachers need to ensure children are introduced to new situations and Bedrova and Leong (2003) further argue that as children's repertoire of roles begins to grow they acquire a wide range of vocabulary to suit each role and therefore it is essential that children are encouraged to play different roles. When entering new contexts and situations, new and different demands are made on language use and therefore new language can be used and developed effectively (Byron 1986). Furthermore, it is <https://assignbuster.com/role-play-area-increase-childrens-oral-language/>

important that children are introduced to new settings and experiences in order to engage them with high-level play (Bedrova and Leong 2003).

However, it is important to note that children often revert to playing family roles, even within a new area, as they are familiar and comfortable with these roles (Bedrova and Leong 2003).

When children are introduced to a new theme within the role-play area, they engage with and use new vocabulary which would be appropriate for the theme and situation they are acting out (Bedrova and Leong (2003). Bedrova and Leong (2003) believe that when children use new words within their play it shows that the children understand the meaning of the words they are using and are able to master the vocabulary within the meaningful context of play. While children are practicing their language and discussing the play they will engage in, the teacher should step in to prompt children to use the vocabulary they have learnt (Bedrova and Leong 2003)

Teachers may create stimulating and exciting role-play areas that contain a variety of quality resources however, when a role-play area is kept the same for several weeks children's experiences are unlikely to be move the child forward past free and directed play modes (Moyles 1989). Due to this children should be aware that the time they spend within the role-play area is limited (Clipson-Boyles 1998). When introducing a new and exciting role-play area there should be some opportunity for free-play to occur before teacher direction is implemented to provide children with a direction to explore other dimensions and extend their learning (Moyles 1989). However, Bedrova and Leong (2003) believe that teacher intervention should occur

before children access the role-play area in order to raise the level of play occurring within the classroom.

Talk is an essential element within play as children use it constantly, either when talking to themselves, others and even toys and playthings (Moyles 1989). Although the use of role-play is beneficial, the quality of learning that occurs is limited by the quality of the resources available to children (Clipson-Boyles 1998). Bodrova and Leong (2003) concur with this statement and believe the use of a variety of props and objects provide children with the best opportunities to practice their language. Moyles (1989) further develops this argument by stating that if play is structured by the materials and resources that have been made available the quality of play occurring will be dependent on the quality, quantity and variety of resources being provided. However, Martin and Dombey (2002) argue that the quality and richness of play language arises from children managing tensions when creating a play world, the storylines and multiple identities they create as they strive to have their voice heard. Therefore, teachers should look at children's language while they are in role and out of role (Martin and Bombey 2002).

The practical element of play within the role-play area aids the development of language acquisition as play provides intense motivation for young children to learn while they play (Chambers 1999) while also allowing children the option of either repeating or varying the language being used (Cook 2000). Therefore the role-play area provides children with a wealth of opportunities to develop language through play (Tassoni and Hicker 2005). However, a crucial element in using the role play area in developing

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language is the important role the teacher plays in recognising and valuing the play which occurs within the role play area while ensuring children know they are accountable for their learning and their actions within the role play area (Clipson-Boyles 1998).

Methodology Chapter

The research to answer the question “ Does the increased use of the role-play area increase children’s oral language acquisition?” was based in a large school with 300 children on roll and 30 teaching staff in Oxfordshire. The research was carried out in a mixed Year 1 and 2 class which consisted of 30 children for a period of five weeks.

In order to explore and answer the question ‘ Does the increased use of the role-play area increase children’s oral language acquisition?’ a case study approach was taken. A case study is ideal for allowing one aspect of a problem to be examined and explored in some depth (Bell 2010). It also provides an accurate and detailed account of events, feeling and views given by real people in a real situation (Basit 2010) which is achieved in relation to this question through the use of interviews, observations and questionnaires.

Due to the nature of the question, the methods used collected both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data is represented with numbers and provide the reader with explicit information (Denscombe 2003). In contrast, qualitative data encompasses several research methods as there is a written or oral outcome that is later interpreted (Denscombe 2003). The use of both quantitative and qualitative data reinforced the reliability and validity of the information gathered, as the accuracy of the

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findings increases through the implementation of different methods of investigation (Denscombe 2003)

Due to the case study element of the question, as well as the benefits of collecting both qualitative data and quantitative data, the research methods of unstructured group interviews, participant observation and questionnaires were chosen. The use of a method such as document scrutiny would not have been appropriate for the research as the question was more concerned with oral language skills rather than children's written skills.

Interviews were used during the study as they were easy to adapt and allowed for the interviewer to follow up on ideas and answers which could be further developed and clarified (Bell 2010). The use of unstructured interviews allowed the interviewee to develop their own thoughts as the process was started by introducing a theme or topic from which the researcher developed their ideas (Denscombe 2003). The use of interviews suited the question as it recorded children's views and feelings in regards to changes implemented within their classroom. These interviews were carried out informally (Basit 2020) and created a deeper understanding of individuals' ideas (Denscombe 2003).

Group interviews operated at the level of those participating (Denscombe 2003). The main purpose of group interviews was for the participants to interact and respond to what the others were saying and the interviewee took a step back and tended to moderate the discussion (Bell 2010).

However, the use of group interviews can be difficult, especially in scheduling when it can take place and controlling the amount of people that

may be talking at once (Denscombe 2003). A limitation to group interviews is that quieter people tend to be forgotten as the more confident members take charge of the group and the answers (Denscombe 2003). Another factor that needs to be considered is that people may provide answers which are deemed as acceptable within the group and not disclose their true opinions (Denscombe 2003). Despite this, the use of group interviews allowed for the collection of opinions from children of different abilities and therefore showed how the changes affected children of different abilities.

Interviews allowed for valuable insight to be gained into how the changes, which were implemented, affected children's language acquisition. Due to the positive arguments above, and the opportunity to gain an understanding of children's feelings and ideas towards the changes, ensured interviews were ideal for carrying out research. However, it was important to realise that the children participating may have answered questions as they felt obliged to answer, rather than how they truly felt. Further to this, on different days, children may be experiencing different emotions and this may have affected their answers during the interview.

Participant observation was used during the research as this method relies on the idea that the participants being observed are unaware and act to what happens in the normal way (Denscombe 2003). This type of observation normally occurs when the observer is within the setting on a regular basis to improve their practice (Basit 2010) and was employed due to the researchers regular presence within the classroom this research method was adopted. Participant observation allowed for the researcher to note that children's natural responses and actions within the role-play area. It further

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lent itself as children a method which collected unbiased data due to the researcher refraining from interfering with the participants. However, it is important to note that despite the researcher aiming to remain unobtrusive (Denscombe 2003) children may still be aware they are being watched.

Questionnaires were used as a method of gathering information from other teachers who employed the role-play area within their classrooms.

Questionnaires need to be carefully planned and the way in which the information gathered and interpreted needs to be considered (Basit 2010).

The answers given, through the use of questionnaires, can be easily divided into opinions and facts and it is important that the researcher is able to distinguish between both views (Basit 2010). Despite this, questionnaires were used as they can offer insight into what teachers think. This allowed for information from an outside source to be collected and further validated the information collected.

The questioners employ the ' Likert scale' which asks participants to comment on how much they agree with a statement (Bell 2010) which allows for quantitative results to be collected. However, it is important to note that answers to questionnaires can not be clarified and the researcher needs to rely on what has been written on paper (Bell 2010). Despite this, the use of a questionnaire allowed for opinions of teachers to be noted and some questionnaires were written on by the participants to further explain and give reasons for their answers. However, when filling out questionnaires the participants may provide answers they believe the researcher wants to collect rather than noting what they truly think.

By using three different methods, triangulation of data occurred. This meant that different aspects were examined and the complexity of human behaviour was taken into account (Cohen et al 2000). It also reinforced the validity of the research collected as the same issue was examined from different angles (Basit 2010) through the implementation of different research methods. The methods used in the research were able to complement each other and support the findings produced but also offered some differences as the different methods were suited towards different purposes (Denscombe 2003). Triangulation further allowed for findings to be cross-checked which validated the results collected within the research (Bell 2010).

Before the research was undertaken, the ethical aspects were considered and examined closely, appendix 1 (page xy). Cohen et al (2000) state that 'social scientists have a responsibility not only to their profession in its search for knowledge and truth, but also for the subjects they depend on for their work'. Therefore, it was important the children were aware that they were being observed throughout the case study and actions were taken to consider any ethical implications.

Data set

Content

Quantity/Quality

Recording Method

Unstructured group interviews

The group interviews consist of six participants (one from each ability group within their separate year groups) The interviews lasted 10-20 minutes and occurred before and after changes were implemented.

In total, two interviews were held with the children.

Tape recorders were used when interviewing six children. Interviews were then transcribed and placed within the appendices (appendix 6 and 7).

Participant Observation

The role-play area was observed for one hour a week for five weeks. The children within the role-play area were not selected and the focus of the observation was the language being used.

In total, five observations occurred.

Notes made while observing the role-play area once a week.

Notes written on post-it notes at all times to note use of new vocabulary used etc and then typed onto the computer and placed in the appendices (appendix 8)

Teacher Questionnaires

Four teachers filled out a questionnaire which asked for their opinion in how best to aid children's language acquisition.

In total, one questionnaire was filled out.

Questionnaire handed out and filled in independently then handed back to researcher.

These were then collected and placed into the appendix (appendix 2, 3, 4 and 5)

Results

Table 1: Questionnaire Results

Question

Results

1. Do you think the role-play area helps children learn and become familiar with language?

Yes - 100%

2. How effective is the role-play area in allowing children to develop their language?

4 - 66%

5 - 33%

3. Do you set up an area specifically to encourage children to practice and extend their learning and therefore engage in topic-specific vocabulary?

Yes - 100%

4. With the role-play area currently set up have you noticed children using topic related vocabulary?

Yes - 100%

5. If yes, how frequently is this language used?

3 - 33%

4 - 33%

5 - 33%

6. Are the children able to use the language correctly and in an appropriate context?

Yes - 66%

When modeled - 33%

7. For future topics, would you think about ensuring the role-play area allows for topic specific vocabulary to be used (especially in terms of science vocabulary).

Yes - 100%

8. How might you ensure that this is achieved?

Key vocabulary displayed, teacher modeling, Sharing experiences with class, interactive resources

Table 2: Interview One Results

Question

Key responses

1. How do you think the school room helps you learn?

Lets children know more about emergency vehicle and traditional stories through questions and for others and answering questions on the wall

2. So what do you do when you were in the school room?

Puppets are used to re-tell or create stories, children learnt about emergency vehicles and traditional tales but did not mention how

3. Do you use the questions on the wall to help you?

No as the questions are too easy

4. Some of the questions on the wall are about traditional tales but some are about emergency vehicles. Does that confuse you?

Yes as children were confused about what each question referred to

5. What kinds of words do you use? Do you use new words, words that you learnt from the stories? Or do you just talk like you normally would?

Children used phrases such as ' The end', ' Once upon a time' and ' The middle'

One child mentioned using adjectives

6. So what could the teachers have done to help you learn more in the school room?

Teachers could have provided the correct answers so children could share and inform each other

7. So what could I change then in the school room?

Questions could be trickier, could have provided more resources for the emergency vehicle section

Table 3: Interview Two Results

Question

Key responses

1. What do you do when you're in the electricity shop?

Children make circuits and discussed some of the circuits they made.

One child discussed how she drew the circuit using symbols and then made it

2. How do you think the electricity shop has helped you learn?

Children know how to make and draw symbols

3. So, in the electricity shop, do you look at the questions?

Yes because they helped their learning and know more about electricity.

No because they are not important.

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4. How helpful was it to have the batteries, wires and light bulbs?

Good so children could build circuits and learn independently

5. Did you find having all the electricity stuff helped you with your language?

Did you use lots of words about electricity?

Not really as they could have drawn them instead.

Yes as you need a battery, wire and bulb to make a circuit.

6. Do you think you speak differently in the electricians shop than in the rest of the classroom?

More electricity related words are used such as ' mains electricity', ' insulated wire, ' power stations', ' electricity pylons' and ' electrocuted'

7. What helped you to use all the electricity words? Anything special in the electricians' shop that helped you?

The questions helped, the equipment helped and the pictures that were available

Table 4: Observation results

Observation 1: 17/2/2011

Observation 2 : 3/3/2011

Children did not stay on task and therefore did not use new language

Drawings of stories, however, story not told

Child commented on light being dimmer and brighter

Children talked about the parts they were using to make a circuit

Children discuss breaks within a circuit

Child predicted brightness of a bulb from a drawing

Children use new vocabulary effectively and regularly

Observation 3: 10/3/2011

Observation 4: 17/3/2011

Child discusses how some equipment uses mains electricity and the use of a switch

Children discuss how crocodile clips work

One child discusses how he melds lights with his father

Two children discuss solar power and how most electricity comes from a power plant

Children further discuss how pylon wires are insulated

Children discuss why a light may not be working as the crocodile clip does not clip on the bulb holder

Two children discuss how the electricity in the bulb gives off heat

The dangers of electricity are mentioned and how one child could be electrocuted as he put a circuit around his neck

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The purpose of a switch is mentioned.

One child links the word circle with circuit in describing electric flow

Observation 5: 14/3/2011

Child discusses how the electricity is moving through the circuit

Circuit is being made and when the bulb does not light a child mentions that a battery must be broken

Child mentions she saw a traffic light being fixed and that the electricity was stopped so the electrician was not electrocuted