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ECEY5004/C

Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

Word Count: 2,133

Video Length Combined: 13 Minutes 32 Seconds

(AI was not used in this assignment)

Links to the Video assignment:

- [Jack Benney - Digital Story.mov](#)
- [Jack Benney - Physical Book Story.mov](#)

Introduction

Storytelling plays a vital role in the development of children and even influences them from the earliest stages of life. According to Dubiel (2025), stories help children to develop their understanding of themselves and others, ensuring they grow up to become confident, knowledgeable and secure in themselves. Babies in the womb respond to rhythm and tone, and these early exposures to language will help the child develop a quicker understanding of them when they grow up and go through education. When children hear stories between the age of 0 and the age of seven, they are given repeated chances to hear vocabulary in context, follow narrative structure, and connect spoken language to its meaning. These experiences can help develop the pathways they need for their reading and writing abilities in later life. Storytelling also supports social and emotional development because it helps

children make sense of the world, interpret feelings, and imagine different perspectives. This is backed up by Davey (2025), who state that storytelling is a tool that has been used since the dawn of time and is used to both entertain and instil deep, important values and messages. As children grow in a digital world, the link between storytelling and literacy extends to digital literacy. This is because children begin to encounter stories not only through pages on a book but also through digital platforms. Bouchrika (2025) furthers this by stating that digital storytelling is vital as it helps to persuade the brain and heart. This blend of traditional and digital storytelling can prepare children for a future in which both forms of literacy are necessary.

The Activity

In the observed activity, I read the book *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* to a mixed group of children aged seven and under. I delivered the story with an expressive tone, a variation in pitch, and changes in pace to suit the different moods and environments in the narrative. This meant that I slowed down during the "thick, oozy mud" scene to emphasise how sticky and disgusting the mud was. I then raised the tone again when the bear came and chased the family back home to show a sense of fear and give the impression that the reader was being chased as well. Reading in this way gave the children an immersive listening experience and modelled how language can reflect mood. Stanford (2025) states that one way of maintaining engagement levels with the children, asking open-ended questions is key. During the story, questions were asked to keep them interacting, questions like 'Who else would be scared of going bear hunting' and 'which part of their journey would you not like to go through'. The expressive style of reading made the story fun and engaging for the children. Fluency, rhythm and phrasing are key elements of early reading development. National Center on Improving Literacy (2025) states that fluency when reading allows children to gain meaning which influences their morals and character as they grow up. When children hear fluent reading, they internalise how sentences flow, how emphasis changes meaning, and how stories carry emotional intent. Although the children did not engage in a follow-up activity, the listening experience still contributed to their literacy because of exposure to quality oral language.

Another important aspect of the practice was the use of tone and pace. This helped to reflect the physical and emotional journey in the story. This type of delivery is different from a normal read because it gives children an experience in how spoken language can communicate different kinds of setting, mood and tension. When children repeatedly hear narrative delivered with expression, they begin to understand that reading is not only about pronouncing words but also about making them mean something. There are different approaches to storytelling in early years settings, and not all practitioners read with the same level of expression. Some will use props, puppets or other things to make a story come to life. Raisingchildren.net.au (2023) states that the best storytellers use gestures, facial expressions, funny voices, noises and other expressive tools. Other practitioners may use digital storybooks, animated clips or recorded narrations instead of live reading. These differences can be due to practitioner confidence, access to resources, training backgrounds, or beliefs about what best supports children's engagement. In this case, the choice to use voice alone without props placed emphasis on the children's listening and imagination.

Listening to expressive storytelling gives children templates for how to use speech for effect. Kids First (2025) states that engaging in storytelling promotes interactions which can be an essential tool for the development in their communication skills. Oracy develops not only when children speak but also when they hear skilled models of spoken language. When children later retell stories from memory, they often mirror the tone, pacing and phrasing they have previously heard in adult storytelling. This means that a single high-quality read out loud can have effects on children's ability to story tell, even if no immediate output was observed at the time. The reading activity also contributes indirectly to writing. Writing in early childhood is strongly connected to oral language and narrative understanding. This view is strengthened by School (2024) whose belief is that effective self-expression through oral communication is a highly transferable skill that can pave the way for better writing skills. Children cannot write what they cannot say, and they cannot say what they do not understand. Through hearing stories with a structure, children internalise a narrative order. They envision a beginning, the journey through obstacles, a climax and an ending. This knowledge of structure is later drawn upon when they begin to produce written narratives. Even without a writing task, the exposure itself still teaches them story patterns that later

inform composition. Although the session did not include any digital activity, just pausing and playing the video on the screen, it is still relevant to link traditional storytelling to digital literacy. Children who develop strong narrative competence and listening skills are better prepared to interpret digital stories later. This is furthered by Carepointe Academy (2025) who state that improved listening skills from storytelling can improve grammar and develop their own reading skills. Digital story platforms, multimedia texts still rely on the same narrative rules of sequence, character, setting and consequence. When children know how stories work in spoken form, they can transfer that understanding to screen-based stories. In this sense, oral storytelling acts as a precursor to digital literacy because it gives children the ideas to make sense of narrative content delivered using technology.

Some early years settings now use digital storytelling in place of reading aloud. For instance, instead of a practitioner reading the story live, they might put an animated version of the same book on the interactive whiteboard or play the audiobook for the class. This can make the session more visually appealing and reduce pressure on staff, but it is not a like-for-like replacement for an adult modelling language in real time. A recorded story cannot pause, exaggerate, or re-phrase in response to the children's reactions in the way a human reader can. Digital storytelling (2024) states that some learners might not be able to express their thoughts during the story as they usually could do; this could cause the children to lose interest and not feel a part of the experience.

There are some strengths with digital storytelling. It can offer features that live reading simply cannot, such as subtitles, the option to replay parts, and a combination of sound, image and text all reinforcing the message together. Hernandez (2023) states that digital storytelling can provide authentic learning experiences and "uncheatable" assessments. In practice, the value depends on the underlying intention. If the priority is oracy and spoken language modelling, live reading remains the stronger approach. If the aim is to reinforce understanding or improve access, digital versions can be a helpful tool alongside, rather than instead of, human reading. The practice observed sits within a wider body of early years literacy guidance online that promotes exposure to high-quality language experiences. For example, World Economic Forum (2019) states that reading aloud may support students to develop sustained attention, strong listening skills and enhanced cognitive development.

Literacy development is also about communication and language foundations as stated by GOV.UK (2025). In addition to UK policy guidance, literacy organisations emphasise the impact of repeated storytelling experiences in early life, according to National Literacy Trust (2025). Taken together, these sources support the claim that even a single expressive storytelling session has educational value for children under seven, even without a recorded output or evidence to the contrary. Further comparisons suggest that live reading is not the same as story-sack work. Story sacks make the story visible through objects, while a live reading leaves the imagery in the child's mind. When props are present, children tend to rely on what they can see and touch rather than building the scene mentally. Vipfanauctions (2025) combats this by stating that props play a crucial part in enhancing the storytelling experience as it has the power to create a deeper connection with the audience. This can also be useful for children with delayed language because the objects offer concrete support, but if used too often it can reduce the child's own cognitive effort. Digital storytelling provides pictures and sound but no physical objects, and the visuals are fixed rather than imagined. When screens supply the imagery, the child receives a ready-made interpretation rather than generating one. This matters because literacy development is not just about exposure, but it is also about mental processing. If children are always shown what a forest looks like or how a character should sound, they are not required to form those pictures themselves. Live reading without props therefore keeps a distinct value, as it leaves a space that the child must fill with their imagination.

Work on child development repeatedly explains that narrative listening supports not only language but thinking. Magrid (2024) states that sequencing helps children's learning abilities which can be used from storytelling to science as it involves cognitive skills and critical thinking. Children who learn to follow a story line are following a structure, even if they are not aware of it. Emotional development is also served by stories because children hear feelings named and resolved in a safe form. They learn that fear can pass, conflict can end, and characters can change. This emotional rehearsal supports self-regulation and allows them to feel at peace with the type of person they are and how they feel about themselves. Digital literacy can develop from the same storytelling foundations. When children later engage with online stories, videos, book apps or interactive picture books, they are not starting from scratch; they are building on an understanding of how stories

unfold, change and reach a conclusion. Being digitally literate is not just about knowing how to use a device. It is about being able to make sense of the information it presents. Without a grasp of narrative, digital content can feel like meaningless noise. In this way, traditional storytelling serves as a foundation for digital learning rather than an alternative to it. Child-led retelling differs from adult-led storytelling in a significant way. When adults tell a story, children are receivers of both structure and language. When children retell a story, they become active producers who must retrieve, organise and verbalise the content themselves. This shift from receiving to producing is what strengthens memory, narrative control and expressive language. Even if children do not retell immediately, repeated listening lays the groundwork for later retelling. Some children internalise the story first and speak about it later, so the absence of immediate output does not mean that learning has not taken place. Story exposure and story production do not happen at the same pace for all children, and pushing for retelling too soon can reduce a child's confidence. The session that was observed contributed to the child's internal store of story language even without a follow-up performance.

Conclusion

The materials reviewed online, and the observations discussed in this paper support the idea that expressive oral storytelling has clear links to children's oracy, reading and later writing skills. The practice that was observed provided a live model of prosody and narrative structure, which contributes to the mental frameworks that children draw on when speaking, reading and writing. Even without a follow-on task, exposure to rich oral language still has developmental value. Digital literacy was not directly part of the session, but the narrative learning that took place can be applied to digital contexts where stories are delivered through screens. The online sources used to support this paper were drawn from UK government guidance and national literacy organisations, which are suitable for this age group and area of practice.

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