

Cover Sheet

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Assignment Number: ECEY5004

Assignment: Produce a self-reflective study of your language skills through a storytelling activity that would be appropriate for young children. You will need to demonstrate how the activity could promote babies' and young children's language development and early literacy skills, including digital literacy skills.

Total word count: 1984

Part 1:

- Video link 1 – Live Story Telling - https://uowtsd-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/r/personal/2408631_student_uwtsd_ac_uk/Documents/Level%205%20-%20Half%20way/Language%20and%20Literacy/ECEY5004%20-%202408631%20-%20The%20Colour%20Monster%20LIVE.mp4?csf=1&web=1&nav=eyJyZWZlcnJhbEluZm8iOnsicmVmZXJyYWxBcHAIoiJPbmVEcmI2ZUZvckJ1c2luZXNzIiwicmVmZXJyYWxBcHBQbGF0Zm9ybSI6IldlYiIsInJlZmVycmFsTlW9kZSI6InZpZXciLCJyZWZlcnJhbFZpZXciOiJNeUZpbGVzTGlua0NvcHkiX0&e=bX63aK
- Video Link 2 – Digital Story 5minutes 51 seconds - https://uowtsd-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/r/personal/2408631_student_uwtsd_ac_uk/Documents/Level%205%20-%20Half%20way/Language%20and%20Literacy/The%20Colour%20Monster%20-%20Lang%20and%20Lit%20ECEY5004.mp4?csf=1&web=1&nav=eyJyZWZlcnJhbEluZm8iOnsicmVmZXJyYWxBcHAIoiJPbmVEcmI2ZUZvckJ1c2luZXNzIiwicmVmZXJyYWxBcHBQbGF0Zm9ybSI6IldlYiIsInJlZmVycmFsTlW9kZSI6InZpZXciLCJyZWZlcnJhbFZpZXciOiJNeUZpbGVzTGlua0NvcHkiX0&e=RXRfl3

Part 2:

Page 3: A self-reflective study of language development and early literacy through storytelling in early childhood.

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AI statement – Throughout the duration of this assignment I acknowledge the use of the following:

- <https://copilot.microsoft.com/chats/uWfmGxnT1d6Cv1bTnZhjv> to support me to check my own text for grammatical and syntactical mistakes and for suggestions to rephrase my own work.
- Microsoft Snipping tool to record original Ceebebies online Bedtime Story.
- <https://clipchamp.com/en/> to clip original recording and remove original sound track.
- <https://clipchamp.com/en/> champ to edit, overlay sounds and record narrator's new track.
- <https://www.canva.com/> to create the digital story.
- <https://www.canva.com/> to edit and overlay sound/ images and music to the digital story.
- <https://www.canva.com/> to clip and edit videos added into the digital story.

Part 2: A self-reflective study of language development and early literacy through storytelling in early childhood.

Storytelling in early childhood is more than reading a script, it carries cultural flavour and language that enriches interactions and provides meaningful context for language development (Cremin *et al.*, 2016). Tomasello views language acquisition as a cultural and social process that is shaped and shared by practices such as storytelling, where children learn through intentional reading and joint attention (Silva, 2023). In agreement, Clark and Vygotsky demonstrate that adult-child interactions and scaffolding through storytelling introduce and reinforce vocabulary, supporting children's uptake, semantic understanding and long term language development (Clarke. 2016: Cremin *et al.*, 2017). In contrast Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar contradicts suggests that children are biologically primed to acquire language through innate cognitive structures, with minimal reliance on social involvement (Williams Jones, 2025).

The oral richness of storytelling allows adults and children to interact in a natural, reciprocal manner that fosters language growth and a deeper understanding (Lastikka, A. L. and Karlsson, L., 2022, p. 147). Research shows that storytelling develops narrative competence, oral fluency and phonological awareness all of which are foundational for language and literacy development (Wright and Dunsmuir, 2019: Maureen *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore storytelling supports cognition and social development and nurtures imagination, creativity, emotional literacy and child led narratives (Cremin *et al.*, 2017).

This self reflective study explores the use of intonation, actions and gestures in the adjoining live and digital video's, examining how these expressive tools enhance the narrator's language delivery and support children's language and early literacy development.

Liu *et al.* (2022) state that intonation refers to the variation in pitch, rhythm and tone during speech which conveys meaning beyond the actual word itself. Playing a crucial role in language development, especially in early childhood by helping children interpret emotion, intention and structure within spoken language. Key functions of intonation are grammatical structuring, signalling the sentence type such as a question or a statement, emotional expression, conveying feelings such as

excitement or uncertainty and discourse management, helping listeners to follow the flow of conversation and the speakers intent (Liu *et al.*, 2022: Frota and Butler, 2018, p. 145) .

Sorianello (2024) states that Intonation falls under the prosodic meaning of language, the way elements of speech change the meaning of the sentence and despite its complexity develops early. Children show prosodic awareness before they speak, in the pitch of their cry and early vocalisations. This makes intonation one of the most resilient features in first language acquisition (Wermke et al., 2021: Sorianello, 2024).

Using intonation within storytelling enhances children's emotional understanding by adding expressive depth to the spoken words. This can be heard in both the live and digital adjoining stories where the narrator emphasises the tone, pitch and rhythm bringing the emotional content to life (Nguyen and Luu, 2024). This helps the children interpret the feelings of the Colour Monster such as happiness, fear and calm. These prosodic features support the comprehension of new vocabulary by embedding words in meaningful, emotionally resonant contexts which further aids memory, retention and expressive use (Sonsaat-Hegelheiner and Levis, 2025: Sorianello, 2024). Mastermind Behavior (2025) agrees and highlights, storytelling with rich intonation improves children's memory, grammar, and expressive language all of which are key foundations for early literacy.

Intonation also plays a key role in sustaining children's attention and engagement during storytelling. Expressive, dynamic speech patterns help capture a child's attention and interest. These patterns support how a story unfolds and helps to guide understanding of a story's structure and the narrators meaning (Frota and Butler, 2018). Through intentional, contextualised language children begin to grasp the nuance and semantics of words developing sensitivity to how meaning shifts with tone.

This is clearly demonstrated in both the live and digital renditions of The Colour Monster, where the narrator transitions between emotions, such as happiness, sadness and anger, using varied pitch, rhythm and tone. These prosodic shifts offer scaffolding and emotional depth that extend beyond the words alone.

By embedding vocabulary within emotionally rich contexts, intonation supports comprehension and retention. It also enhances expressive speech, helping children stay focused and connected to the narrator voice.

According to Precision Family Therapy (2025), intonation and narrative structure help children grasp sentence types, emotional cues, and communicative intent. Similarly, Mastermind Behavior (2025) highlights how storytelling with rich intonation improves memory, grammar, and expressive language in early years. Further evidence from Maureen *et al.*, (2022) found that storytelling, especially when paired with oral and digital formats, significantly enhances early literacy skills such as oral comprehension and phonological awareness.

Dubiel (2016), Bruce *et al.* (2020) and Tsao *et al.* (2023) are in agreement that intentional vocal modelling, intonation, rhythm, and pace, plays a crucial role in supporting expressive language development in early childhood. They emphasise that such modelling not only enhances children's ability to make meaning and express ideas, but also aligns with holistic pedagogical practices that nurture emotional, social, and linguistic growth. Tsao *et al.* (2023) further demonstrate that rhythm perception and production are closely linked to vocabulary development and phonological awareness, reinforcing the value of prosodic variations in early years communication.

The digital rendition of The Colour Monster ensures consistent prosody, offering clear intonation, pacing and a reliable rhythm. It has the addition of musical sound effects and visual animations that reinforce the narrators voice and tone. This helps to interpret the emotional context of the language such as melodic music accompanying 'love' or red visuals paired with 'anger'. This multimodal format supports independent engagement and can be useful for the child who would prefer to explore emotions independently or in a quiet space at their own pace. (Rahiem, 2021; Maureen *et al.*, 2020).

However, digital story telling presents limited responsiveness. The narrator is unable to adjust prosody in real time based on a child's reactions or questions and the fixed rhythm may feel mismatched to a child's wellbeing or developmental needs and may flatten emotional depth. As noted by O'Bryne *et al.* (2018), digital formats may lack spontaneous emotional attunement and embodied modelling such as facial

expressions, gesture and coregulation cues that are central to storytelling. The narrator however has sought to minimise the limitation of digital storytelling by pairing short, emotions specific videos with feelings of the Colour Monster, each using appropriate prosody to reflect the associated feelings. To support autonomy and engagement, children have the option to watch the digital video as a whole where they can pause and rewind or to explore the story through an interactive PowerPoint presentation. This format encourages children to control the pace, spending as much time as needed on each page or revisiting previous sections. This allows children to mirror the flexibility of a physical book and supports individual reflection.

Live storytelling allows narrators to use intonation dynamically, adjusting pitch, stress, and rhythm in response to children's emotional cues and comprehension. Gunawardena and Koivula (2024) highlight how pedagogical storytelling, when delivered with expressive prosody, strengthens emotional literacy and engagement. This can be seen in the live rendition of The Colour Monster where the narrator uses adaptive intonation to vary pitch, pace and rhythm in real time to match the child's emotional responses and developmental understanding. Pauses, emphasis and repetition scaffold comprehension of the complex emotions. Frota and Butler (2018), emphasised that prosodic variation is key to helping children decode speaker intent and emotional tone. This is noted when the narrator pauses to connect the colour coded feelings to a child's lived experience creating space for reflection and shared meaning-making.

This real-time modulation helps convey emotional nuance, supports co-regulation, and fosters shared meaning-making. Through expressive vocal delivery, paired with gestures and facial cues, children experience a richer, more embodied model of emotional language. Recent research highlights the importance of intonation as part of multimodal communication in early childhood. When paired with gesture and facial expression, intonation enhances children's ability to interpret emotional meaning, structure spoken language, and engage in emotionally attuned interactions. Research by Nguyen and Luu (2024) and guidance from the Department for Education (DfE, 2023) shows that this multi model approach supports and strengthens early language development and are foundations for early reading.

Following on with actions and gesture in storytelling, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory continues to inform early years practice by emphasising the role of symbolic tools, such as actions, gestures, and signs, in scaffolding meaning through social interaction (Zhou, 2024). This perspective is echoed by Bruner, who highlights the importance of enactive representation, where physical storytelling supports understanding before symbolic language emerges. Similarly, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences recognises the value of kinaesthetic engagement, showing how gesture-based storytelling offers meaningful access and emotional connection for a diverse range of learners (Teach HQ, 2023: Early Years TV, 2023).

Physical cues such as gestures and accompanying facial expressions help children interpret meaning, emotion and narrative structure. They are often used before spoken words and are tools that offer a way to express their needs and ideas fostering confidence and reducing communication barriers (Sheffield Children's NHS, ND). In addition gesture and sign supported storytelling ensure that children with communication needs can fully participate through multisensory engagement supporting equity and belonging (Makaton, 2025: National Day Nurseries Association, NDNA, 2021: VIC Government, 2023). For EAL, English as an Additional Language, learners actions, gestures and signs support understanding through visual and contextual cues. These visual and contextual cues reduce reliance on verbal instruction and promote language acquisition through contextually rich interactions (NALDIC, ND).

The digital storytelling includes short videos that use Makaton, a flexible, multi model communication system based on natural gesture, which supports language development, emotional expression, emotional literacy and engagement (Makaton, 2024: NDNA, 2021). Although digital formats simulate gestures, actions and signs they lack real time responsiveness and miss the relational adaptive depth of live interactions.

The live storytelling has Makaton signing throughout, this ensures that all children can fully engage in the story and song. Linking spoken words with gestures helps children process and remember new language especially during repetitive and rhythmic storytelling (Nguyen and Luu, 2024: DfE, 2023:). Medlicott (2019) notes that using gestures and facial expressions during storytelling encourages

engagement, allowing children to become more involved and confident in retelling stories supporting building comprehension and early writing. This reflects Piaget's preoperational stage, where children begin to use symbolic thinking to represent ideas through signs, actions, and play. Physical cues in storytelling support language acquisition, help children sequence events, and build narrative structure, all of which contribute to developing literacy skills, including understanding plot, character, and story structure. These cues also enable children to express and organise their understanding of the world, supporting both cognitive and communicative development Porto (2023).

In both live and digital storytelling Makaton signs are open to interpretation, without clear knowledge, understanding and sufficient training narrators may unintentionally misuse or misrepresent elements of a story. In both storytelling videos the narrator is a licensed Makaton tutor ensuring the signing has been quality assured and verified as accurate at the time of filming. This supports fidelity to the communication system and safeguards inclusive practice.

Although current research on Makaton lacks strong methodologies (Larkin, 2021) there is broad agreement that it helps children communicate and interact socially offering flexible ways to express themselves especially for those who may not have a voice otherwise (Larkin, 2021; Makaton, 2024; NDNA, 2021).

In summary while both intonation and gesture enrich storytelling, intonation may offer greater nuance in conveying emotion, emphasis, and narrative pacing particularly in relation to literacy development. It supports prosody, phonological awareness, and expressive language. Gestures and signs, meanwhile, support symbolic understanding, sequencing and accessibility particularly for EAL learners and children with communication needs. Artificial Intelligence (AI) enables narrators to refine storytelling techniques, ensure consistency in systems like Makaton and create engaging multimodal resources that build language, comprehension and early literacy skills. These tools empower diverse learners to connect meaningfully with both narrative content and spoken language.

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