

Based on theoretical evidence, evaluate and reflect on your personal contribution to developing the literacy skills of children, young people within your video presentation.

This assignment comprises two elements: an analysis of the theoretical and practical aspects of literacy development. Part One evaluates the perspectives of prominent theorists on language development, educational methodologies, and policy execution, highlighting the correlation between oracy and literacy, as well as the obstacles that hinder them. Part Two provides a reflective analysis of a Key Stage Two reading session, employing Gibbs's Reflective Cycle as a framework to evaluate its effectiveness and establish opportunities for improvement.

Part One

Language development can be defined as the process by which students acquire the skills necessary to comprehend and utilise language for effective communication (Lightbown and Spada, 2013). This encompasses competence to comprehend spoken language and articulate one's thoughts and emotions with enhanced fluency. Within educational contexts such development emerges from verbal, written, and gestural communication, facilitated by the concurrent development of phonological (sound awareness), semantic (meaning comprehension), and syntactic (grammatical structure) components of language (Lightbown and Spada, 2013). Language development is intricately associated with cognitive processes that enable students to

organise thoughts, understand new experiences, and engage in higher-order thinking (Gross, 2017). Effective language is essential for literacy acquisition since it underpins fundamental skills including decoding, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension. Oracy, encompassing speaking and listening abilities, is proposed to constitute a crucial foundation for reading by assisting learners in identifying phonemes, enhancing vocabulary, and understanding grammatical structures. This is proposed to facilitate transition from verbal communication to written expression, allowing learners to comprehend texts and convey ideas effectively through reading and writing (Didau, 2018; Butlin, 2025).

Lev Vygotsky's socio-cognitive theory posits that language is pivotal in cognitive development, with speech potentially evolving from social interaction into internalised thought. He suggested that children may be innately equipped with fundamental skills such as attention, sensation, perception, and memory, which could develop into advanced cognitive processes through social interaction (McLeod, 2025). In this context, robust oracy skills are deemed fundamental to literacy, as verbal communication allows children to order thoughts and derive meaning, which can subsequently be applied to reading and writing. Vygotsky delineated three phases of speech development: social, private, and inner speech, illustrating the progressive role of language in facilitating autonomous reasoning and understanding (McLeod, 2025). A fundamental element of his theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), wherein learning can be augmented through scaffolding offered by more knowledgeable others, thereby facilitating the cultivation of vocabulary, comprehension, and sentence structure (Didau, 2018). Methodologies including the use of thought stems can assist learners in

articulating and structuring ideas, particularly for individuals with speech, language, or learning needs by alleviating cognitive load and enhancing coherence in writing (Didau, 2018; Pearson UK & International Schools, 2024). Vygotsky accentuated the potential value of collaborative learning via discussion and sustained shared thinking, which may enhance vocabulary acquisition, critical thinking, and profound comprehension. Despite its significance, oracy, primarily listening skills, may be inadequately cultivated in educational settings, despite early spoken language being recognised as a robust predictor of future reading achievement (Grigg, 2014). As a result, there have been growing demands, for speaking and listening to be prioritised equally with reading, writing, and arithmetic (Oracy Education Commission, 2024).

Contrasting Vygotsky', B. F. Skinner espouses a behaviourist perspective, positing that language development may be perceived as a learnt behaviour modified by operant conditioning. From this perspective, language is not deemed innate but may evolve progressively as students imitate adult speech and elicit reinforcement for correct usage (McLaughlin, 2010). Modelling is regarded as an essential strategy whereby adults exhibit correct pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntactic structures that children may replicate and refine through repetition. Positive reinforcement, involving praise or awards, such as stickers and Dojo points, may encourage the repetition of accurate language usage, potentially facilitating language acquisition and enhancing learners' confidence (Ripollés et al., 2014). This strategy is criticised for diminishing intrinsic motivation and cultivating a competitive environment, perhaps heightening anxiety and adversely affecting self-concept in some pupils (Hu, 2004).

Consistent exposure to spoken and written language may strengthen vocabulary, refine expression, and cultivate fundamental reading and writing abilities. Repetition frequently correlates to the fortification of neural pathways, thereby potentially improving memory, recall, and proficiency in language patterns (Larsen-Freeman, 2012). This approach is evident in educational settings through structured interventions such as Read Write Inc programmes, which prioritise explicit instruction in phonics, essential for decoding, and spelling. Such initiatives may be particularly advantageous for learners with additional learning needs such as dyslexia, as they may alleviate cognitive load and enhance fluency, by decomposing learning into accessible steps (Gross, 2017).

However, this methodology has endured criticism by some educators asserting that an excessive focus on phonics and repetition may lead to mechanical and uninspiring learning experiences, thus diminishing students' motivation to read (Gregori, 2024). Moreover, it has been contended that an exclusive emphasis on decoding inadequately fosters the cultivation of proficient readers. Effective reading necessitates not only word recognition but also linguistic understanding, encompassing vocabulary knowledge, grammatical awareness, and the capacity to comprehend meaning (Cowley, 2021; Butlin, 2025). The complex nature of language, including divergent phonetic representations and contextual meanings, homophones and homographs, underscore the limits of solely employing phonics-based methodologies (Nutbrown, 1997; Wallace, Macrory and Hollmann, 2024).

Moreover, instructional methods including spelling tests, which emphasise memorisation, may perpetuate superficial learning rather than promoting profound engagement (Harlen and Deakin Crick, 2003).

This may yield learners with fundamental reading and writing skills however devoid of the will to utilise them, especially if the educational experience is perceived as monotonous (Dowling, 2014).

Several factors may provide significant barriers to the progress of oracy and literacy abilities. Socioeconomic disadvantage may restrict access to resources including books, thereby limiting early reading opportunities (Makhlouf, 2024). In some cases, parents may possess limited reading skills, which could diminish their ability to facilitate children's language development. Moreover, increased parental stress, correlated with financial difficulties, may lead to more authoritarian parenting styles, thereby constraining both the quality and number of verbal exchanges and diminishing children's exposure to an extensive vocabulary. Poverty is associated with heightened stress in children, potentially impairing cognitive functions like memory and executive functioning (Perkins, Finegood and Swain, 2013).

Further obstacles may emerge from individual learning needs. Children with language impairments may find it challenging to interpret instructions or grasp complex language, whereas conditions like dyslexia can impair decoding, information processing, and the comprehension of abstract concepts (Gross, 2017). Diverse learning preferences, including visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic types, may require tailored educational strategies (Walton and Goddard, 2012). These challenges, combined with comparisons to more accomplished peers, may lead to anxiety, diminished self-efficacy, and the emergence of avoidance strategies (Macdonald et al., 2021). As a result, students may receive negative labels, thereby exacerbating disengagement and obstructing progress (Didau, 2014).

Research proposes that early language exposure is crucial for literacy development, revealing significant variations in vocabulary size from a young age. These disparities may expand over time, resulting in particular pupils from underprivileged backgrounds languishing considerably behind their peers (Education Policy Institute, 2016). This may prompt enquiries regarding the effectiveness of educational provisions, particularly if curricula emphasise topic coverage and examination outcomes at the expense of fundamental language competencies. This strategy may neglect existing literacy deficits, thus restricting student engagement and hindering cognitive growth. Post-COVID-19 pandemic evidence underscores these concerns, revealing a heightened dependence on interventions managed by teaching assistants who express feelings of inadequacy in providing targeted support, which may adversely affect the quality of learning in selected educational environments (Hall and Webster, 2023).

Educational policies play a key role in supporting oracy and literacy development within schools. Graham Donaldson (2015) suggests that literacy could be understood as a whole-school responsibility, extending across all curriculum areas, and may support both thinking and learning rather than communication alone. This perspective also indicates that how children are taught may be as significant as curriculum content, encouraging more balanced and engaging pedagogical approaches.

The Welsh Curriculum and the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (2021) may offer structured guidance to teachers to support literacy progression and early identification of learning needs. However, critics suggest such frameworks could become overly bureaucratic with an emphasis on measurable outcomes, potentially constraining creativity and deeper learning (Ahmed, 2024).

Research indicates that pedagogical approaches such as guided reading and storytelling can effectively support literacy development. In response to concerns about declining standards, national initiatives across Wales have sought to strengthen both oracy and literacy. For instance, Estyn (2025) has outlined a three-year focus on reading development from September 2026, promoting evidence-informed practice, while the Whole School Approach to Oracy and Reading Policy (2023) aims to cultivate a sustained culture of reading for enjoyment. Collectively, these initiatives represent a strategic effort to enhance literacy and oracy outcomes and address gaps in learners' language development.

Part Two

Reflective teaching involves a structured approach in which educators critically assess and develop their practice to improve learning outcomes. Informed by the work of Schön (1983) and Gibbs (1988), it promotes ongoing professional development and supports effective pedagogical choices, particularly when adapting literacy and oracy teaching to diverse learners. This commentary will apply Gibbs' reflective cycle to analyse a reading session I conducted.

I conducted a reading session with a Key Stage 2 pupil using the story *The Runaway Pea*, with the aim of promoting engagement and comprehension. I delivered the text using varied vocal expression and incorporated a prop-based activity at the end of the session. A follow-up task would involve pupils creating a "wanted" poster to encourage creativity, support the development of their own narrative versions, and foster language and cognitive skills.

Before the session, I felt apprehensive about using character voices, as this was outside my comfort zone and slightly embarrassing. During the session, I was concerned about maintaining the pupil's attention and ensuring my reading pace supported comprehension. However, after the session, I experienced a sense of achievement and increased confidence, particularly as the session progressed. Overall, I felt the outcome was positive, as the pupil remained engaged throughout and shared moments of humour helped to establish connection, which I recognise as important in supporting effective teaching and learning.

During the session my use of varied character voices, alongside deliberate changes in tone and volume to reflect different emotional moments in the story worked well. Research indicates that expressive reading can enhance pupil engagement, support comprehension, and strengthen understanding of narrative structure, including the distinction between dialogue and narration (Done, 2022; Brunetti *et al.*, 2024). I also found that this approach supported the pupil's ability to follow the storyline and interpret emotional cues within the text. This was reinforced using simple gestures, such as body movements to represent being 'battered' or facial expression to indicate 'stinky', which helped make meaning more accessible and concrete.

I view this as an immersive reading approach, which may support sustained attention and a sense of flow during learning. It also appeared to encourage visualisation of characters, which is linked to the development of higher-level reading comprehension. In line with Kolb's experiential learning theory, knowledge is constructed through experience, and I observed this in the pupil's engagement with the narrative (Brunetti *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, exposure to spoken

language patterns may support the development of verbal fluency in both speaking and writing.

The use of the physical book to display text and illustrations also supported print awareness and helped reinforce word recognition and understanding of written language features (Justice et al., 2009). The pupil remained engaged throughout the session, which may be explained by research suggesting that emotional engagement plays an important role in cognitive processing and learning. I also incorporated moments of participation by pausing at predictable points in the text, such as allowing the pupil to complete phrases like “tumbling d—” with “dryer,” which supported rhythm recognition and active involvement (Stadler and Ward, 2010).

However, the session could have been improved through a more dialogic approach, underpinned by Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory. I could have included more open-ended questions during reading, such as asking children to predict what might happen next or exploring how characters felt, to promote inference, clarification, and deeper comprehension (Jones, 2024). This would have shifted the session from passive listening to a more active engagement. I also missed opportunities to develop vocabulary more explicitly; for example, when encountering unfamiliar words such as “forlorn,” I could have encouraged the pupil to infer meaning from context before providing an explanation and then asking her to repeat it back to me to consolidate understanding and expand vocabulary and knowledge.

In future practice, I would aim to move further towards an interactive model of reading to strengthen engagement, reduce potential reading anxiety, and foster a more sustained enjoyment of reading (Mujahidah, Damayanti and Afiif, 2021).

Overall, this assignment demonstrates that literacy development is shaped by the interplay between theory and practice, with oracy serving as a fundamental foundation. Although engaging pedagogy can improve comprehension, persistent barriers such as socioeconomic disadvantage and limited language exposure continue to constrain progress. The presence of widening literacy gaps in some contexts underscores the importance of consistent, evidence-based, and dialogic approaches to effectively support all learners.

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