

Language and literacy in the digital.

Word count; 1991

Reference list; pages 8-9

Appendix; I haven't used AI to help support me, with this assignment.

[IMG_9328.mov](#)

[IMG_9331.mov](#)

From the moment, a child is born, their world is shaped by sounds, images, emotions, and experiences. During the early years, storytelling plays a vital role in nurturing a child's development. It helps shape their imagination, language skills, emotional intelligence, and understanding of the world. Researchers such as Bruner (1986), Vygotsky (1978), and the National Literacy Trust (2020) agree that storytelling is a powerful tool for supporting communication, learning, and social growth. Bruner believed people make sense of their lives through stories, using narrative to construct meaning (Mattingly, 2008). Between birth and age seven, children's brains develop rapidly, and storytelling supports this growth in several important ways. According to child development theorist Jean Piaget, the preoperational stage (ages 2–7) is when children begin using language and symbols to understand their environment. Storytelling helps them process experiences, explore emotions, and relate to others (Lally et al., n.d.). It also plays a central role in developing language and literacy. Listening to stories exposes children to new vocabulary, sentence patterns, and ways of expressing ideas, building confidence and laying a foundation for reading and writing. It introduces narrative structure, how stories begin, unfold, and resolve. Helping children understand language and encouraging them to create their own stories. According to Janelle Marquez (Speech and Language UK, 2025), storytelling and shared reading are essential for building vocabulary, comprehension, and expressive language, especially in the early years. Similarly, BookTrust highlights that stories help children make sense of themselves and the world, while strengthening their ability to communicate ideas, knowledge, and feelings (Dubiel, 2024). However, when children aren't read to, key areas of development can be delayed. They may struggle with speaking clearly, understanding new words, and expressing thoughts. Their imagination may also be affected, which can impact future learning. Research from Speech and Language UK

and the Education Endowment Foundation shows that early interventions like the Early Talk Boost programme significantly improve language skills in children aged 3–4 who are struggling with speech and understanding (Janelle Marquez, 2025).

Storytelling isn't just enjoyable, it's essential for helping children thrive.

This assignment will now analyse a video of a practitioner delivering two storytelling activities: one using a traditional approach and the other through a digital tool. The stories featured are Goldilocks and the Three Bears and The Hungry Caterpillar, with analysis focused on intonation, use of props, and Gestures.

During the storytelling activity, we used props to help children imagine scenes and characters, making the story more engaging. Children are more likely to stay focused when they're interested, and props helped capture their attention. According to Evelyn Davis (2020), props in early childhood storytelling act as memory triggers and enhance children's ability to follow the sequence and pattern of a story, making the experience more immersive and effective for learning. The practitioner believed props supported children's development in oracy, writing, and reading. This aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and tools like props in language development (Vygotsky, 1978). Interacting with physical objects encouraged children to describe what they saw and felt, helping build vocabulary and confidence in speaking key components of oracy (Gardner, 2025). For example, while reading Goldilocks and the Three Bears, the practitioner used bowls, spoons, a dolly, porridge, and teddy bears to represent key parts of the story and in the digital story of The Hungry Caterpillar, she used fruit as props. This prompted children to talk about what was happening, use descriptive language, and retell the story in their own words. Later in the classroom, children used these experiences to support their writing, contributing words and phrases to describe characters and events. Marie Clay (2001) highlights the importance of linking spoken and written language in early literacy, noting that children often write what they can say. Props also supported reading, as children connected visual items with written words, improving understanding and recall. This aligns with the Curriculum for Wales, which places oracy at the heart of the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience, encouraging learners to develop speaking, listening, and expressive skills through creative contexts like storytelling (Welsh Government, 2022). However, not having many props can be a

disadvantage. In the digital story of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, the practitioner noticed that with fewer physical props, some children became distracted and less engaged, missing opportunities to explore language more deeply. She reflected that adding props, such as a caterpillar to touch and feel, could have made the storytelling more interactive and supported vocabulary development. This highlights the importance of hands on, sensory experiences in supporting speaking, reading, and writing in the early years. Jerome Bruner's theory of scaffolding suggests children learn best when given supportive tools and guidance to build on existing knowledge. Props act as scaffolding by providing visual and tactile support that helps children understand and express ideas more effectively (Bruner, 1966). Props also help young children grasp digital literacy. Hands on play supports understanding of sequencing, characters, and settings, making it easier to transition into digital storytelling. According to the International Literacy Association (2018), using digital tools in ways that suit young children, especially when combined with hands on activities, helps them understand how digital stories work and builds early reading and writing skills. For example, after acting out a story with props, children might use a tablet to record their voices or draw characters, boosting confidence with technology. The National Literacy Trust (2017) also explains that digital tools like apps and tablets support early literacy when used alongside play and adult interaction, helping children connect digital experiences with everyday life. Props offer a bridge between physical storytelling and digital expression, helping children make meaning across different formats. By combining props with digital tools, educators can create rich, playful environments that support both traditional and digital literacy.

Alongside using props, the practitioner also used intonation to enhance storytelling and engage children. David Crystal (2020) explains that intonation is more than pitch changes, it's a key part of expressing meaning and emotion. The way we use our voices helps listeners understand not just the words, but how we feel about them. In the video, the practitioner raised and lowered her voice, added dramatic pauses, and whispered at key moments, bringing the story to life and building anticipation. According to Stonebridge College (2023), different vocal tones help children connect emotionally with the narrative and understand character feelings and plot development. These techniques made it easier for children to follow the story,

anticipate events, and stay focused. The practitioner used intonation in both traditional and digital storytelling. Without it, children may lose interest or become distracted. Isbell et al. (2004) found that children are more engaged when stories are told with vocal expression and interaction. Intonation also supports language development, helping children link tone with meaning, such as recognising when a character is sad or excited, which builds emotional understanding and vocabulary. It promotes oracy, the ability to express thoughts clearly through spoken language. As Voice 21 (2025) explains, strong oracy skills developed in the early years lay the foundation for later success in reading and writing. Expressive storytelling teaches children how to structure ideas, use descriptive language, and build confidence in speaking and listening. However, oracy isn't always prioritised in early years settings. According to Voice 21 (2025), while oracy is essential for developing language, confidence, and social communication, it is often overlooked due to curriculum pressures and most schools often prioritise writing over talking these days. This can limit opportunities for children to develop spoken language skills, even though oracy is a key foundation for literacy. BookTrust (2019) also highlights that using voice and expression during storytelling helps children connect emotionally and stay engaged. This aligns with Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, which emphasises the role of social interaction in learning. When children hear expressive language from adults, they begin to internalise those patterns, supporting speech, comprehension, and emotional awareness (Moore, 2011). The practitioner also praised children when they joined in or responded, linking to Skinner's operant conditioning theory, positive reinforcement encourages repeated behaviour and boosts confidence (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). In the digital story, children chose the story themselves, supporting the voice of the child and empowering them to direct their own learning (UNICEF, 2018). As the practitioner read, children actively engaged by answering questions and repeating key phrases like "one apple, two strawberries," while helping count along. This supported the serve and return method, where the practitioner responded to each child's verbal and nonverbal cues, extending their comments and reinforcing learning. Through this back and forth interaction, children developed communication, language, and numeracy skills, while building confidence and engagement (Centre on the Developing Child, 2016). The practitioner could have allowed more time for questioning to further support curiosity, which links to the EYFS emphasis on active learning and critical thinking (Department for Education,

2021). However, time constraints can make it difficult to fully extend children's interests through open ended questioning. Intonation remains a simple yet powerful tool, changing how a story is told can help children stay engaged and understand more.

The final area focused on during storytelling was gestures. Using gestures helped capture children's attention and supported their understanding of the story. Actions like pointing and miming movements made the experience more interactive and meaningful. Gestures also supported language development, as children connected physical actions with spoken words, reinforcing comprehension and vocabulary (Goldin-Meadow, 2014). Goldin-Meadow (2005) also argues that gestures reveal what children are thinking, often before they can express it verbally. During the session, the practitioner used facial expressions to show emotions and bring the story to life. This aligns with Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, which highlights the role of social interaction, including nonverbal cues, in learning and emotional development. Gestures were used in both traditional and digital storytelling to support oracy, writing, and reading. Acting out stories or using hand movements helped children plan and structure their writing, express ideas, and build vocabulary and confidence. The practitioner also used open ended prompts like "Come on, join in, we will do it together," encouraging participation and verbal expression. However, more consistent encouragement could have further supported engagement. Limited encouragement may reduce children's willingness to participate, affecting confidence, language development, and enjoyment. Gestures also added emotion and meaning to the story, helping children understand unfamiliar words and stay engaged. This supports EYFS guidance, which highlights expressive arts, communication, and emotional development as key learning areas (Department for Education, 2024). Research shows gestures are a fundamental part of early communication and play a critical role in language development, cognitive growth, and literacy (Reality Pathing, 2023). High quality oracy provision, including gestures, helps children develop vocabulary, confidence, and comprehension which are essential for future academic success (Voice 21, 2024). To support digital literacy during The Hungry Caterpillar digital story, children actively participated by clicking through slides and helping pause the story during thinking time. This hands on involvement built confidence with digital tools and encouraged collaboration, turn

taking, and decision making. By engaging with technology purposefully, children connected storytelling with digital skills, supporting communication and early ICT development in line with EYFS outcomes (Department for Education, 2024). In early years settings, educators who recognise and respond to children's gestures can foster meaningful interactions, support language growth, and encourage active participation in storytelling and play.

I have explored several theories and studies that highlight the importance of intonation, props, and gestures in early years learning, which have deepened my understanding. Reflecting on the references I've used, many are strong and relevant. Vygotsky's Social Development Theory is a well established framework in early childhood education, and the EYFS framework supports many of my points. I also found Voice 21 to be a valuable source, as it is a respected organisation in oracy education. However, looking at my reference list, I recognise that in future I need to include more academic books and focus more closely on what the authors say to strengthen my work further.

“Help for Early Years Providers - Department for Education.” (2024). [Help for early years providers : Get help for your setting](#) Accessed 1 Nov. 2025.

“National Literacy Trust.” *National Literacy Trust*, National Literacy Trust, 2019, [National Literacy Trust | UK Literacy Charity](#) Accessed 1 Nov. 2025.

BookTrust. “Visit BookTrust.” *Booktrust.org.uk*, 2019, [www.booktrust.org.uk/](#). Accessed 28 Oct. 2025.

Crystal, David.(2020). “David Crystal – Biography.” [David Crystal – Home](#) Accessed 28 Oct. 2025.

Department for Education. “Development Matters.” *GOV.UK*, 3 Mar. 2023, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-matters--2](#). Accessed 30 Oct. 2025.

Dubiel, Jan. (2024) “The Crucial Role of Storytelling in Early Childhood Education.” *BookTrust*, [www.booktrust.org.uk/resources/find-resources/the-crucial-role-of-storytelling-in-early-childhood-education/](#). Accessed 17 Oct. 2025.

Encyclopedia Britannica. (16 Mar. 2019), “B.F. Skinner | Biography, Facts, & Contributions.” [www.britannica.com/biography/B-F-Skinner](#). Accessed 28 Oct. 2025.

Evelyn. (2020, May 8). *Why can props be important in storytelling for young children? - Educations*. [https://evelyndavis.co.nz/why-can-props-be-important-in-storytelling-for-young-children/](#) Accessed 17 Oct. 2025.

Gardner. “Why Oracy Matters in Early Years.” *TTS*, 2025, [www.tts-group.co.uk/blog/2025/01/08/oracy-in-early-years.html](#). Accessed 21 Oct. 2025.

Goldin-Meadow, Susan. “How Gesture Works to Change Our Minds.” *Trends in Neuroscience and Education*, vol. 3, no. 1, Mar. 2014, pp. 4–6, [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tine.2014.01.002](#). Accessed 1 Nov. 2025.

Goldin-Meadow. (2005). “Susan Goldin-Meadow | Department of Psychology.” [Susan Goldin-Meadow | Department of Psychology](#). Accessed 1 Nov. 2025.

Harvard University. (2025). “Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University.” [Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University](#) Accessed 30 Oct. 2025.

International Literacy Association. (2019). *Digital resources in early childhood literacy development*. [https://www.literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/where-we-stand/ila-digital-resources-early-childhood-literacy-development.pdf](#) Accessed 21 Oct. 2025.

Isbell, Rebecca, et al. "The Effects of Storytelling and Story Reading on the Oral Language Complexity and Story Comprehension of Young Children." *Early Childhood Education Journal*, vol. 32, no. 3, Dec. 2004, pp. 157–163, link.springer.com/article/10.1023/B:ECEJ.0000048967.94189.a3, <https://doi.org/10.1023/b:ecej.0000048967.94189.a3>. Accessed 28 Oct. 2025.

JanelleMarquez. (2025). *Speech and Language UK launches Early Talk Boost research project with Education Endowment Foundation - Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives*. Speech and Language UK: Changing Young Lives. [Speech and Language UK launches Early Talk Boost research project with Education Endowment Foundation - Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives](#). Accessed 15.10.2025.

Jerome Bruner and the process of education - infed.org. (2025, August 8). [infed.org. https://infed.org/dir/welcome/jerome-bruner-and-the-process-of-education/](https://infed.org/dir/welcome/jerome-bruner-and-the-process-of-education/) Accessed 21 Oct. 2025.

Lally Martha and Suzanne Valentine-French. (ND) "Piaget's Preoperational Stage of Cognitive Development | Lifespan Development." [Piaget's Preoperational Stage of Cognitive Development | Lifespan Development](#). Accessed 15.10.2025.

Mattingly, Cheryl, et al. "Bruner's Search for Meaning: A Conversation between Psychology and Anthropology." *Ethos*, vol. 36, no. 1, Mar. 2008, pp. 1–28, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2919784/, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1352.2008.00001.x>. Accessed 1 Nov. 2025.

McLeod, Saul. "Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development." *Simply Psychology*, 2025, www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html. Accessed 21 Oct. 2025.

Moore, Melisa. "Vygotsky's Cognitive Development Theory." *Encyclopedia of Child Behavior and Development*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2011, pp. 1549–1550, [Vygotsky's Cognitive Development Theory | SpringerLink](#) Accessed 28 Oct. 2025.

National Literacy Trust. (2019). "Digital Technology and the Early Years | National Literacy Trust." [Digital technology and the early years | National Literacy Trust](#). Accessed 28 Oct. 2025.

Reality Pathing (2025). "Steps to Foster Effective Gesture Use in Early Childhood Learning." [Steps to Foster Effective Gesture Use in Early Childhood Learning](#) Accessed 1 Nov. 2025.

UNICEF. "UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)." *Unicef*, 2018, www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/. Accessed 30 Oct. 2025.

Voice21. (2025) "Little Learners, Big Voices: Oracy in the Early Years " [Little Learners, Big Voices: Oracy in the Early Years - Voice 21](#) Accessed 28 Oct. 2025.

Vygotsky, Lev. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.
Harvard University Press, 1978. <https://home.fau.edu/musgrove/web/vygotsky1978.pdf>
Accessed 1 Nov. 2025.