

Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

(ECEY5004)

Content:

AI Statement.

Section 1 – Traditional Story - [2408632 Kirstie Harding - Traditional story.mov](#)

Section 2 – Digital Story - [2408632 - Kirstie Harding - Digital story.mp4](#)

Section 3 – Written analysis

Reference list

AI statement:

I confirm that I have used Co-Pilot for research, summarising information and proof-reading purposes only. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes and other resources I used before and after the use of any AI tool which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Introduction

Developing early literacy skills such as reading, writing and oracy has been strongly linked to improved reading and writing abilities later in life, as well as better long-term academic outcomes (Maureen, 2020). Storytelling has long been used in early childhood education as a natural and enjoyable method for teaching these foundational literacy skills (Cremin *et al.*, 2018; Maureen, van der Meij and Ton de Jong, 2022). With the rapid increase in access to and use of digital devices among young children, digital literacy is becoming just as important as traditional literacy skills (Welsh Government, 2022). This is evident in the implementation of the mandatory Digital Competence Framework and its associated developmental pathways including communication and exploration, which support the integration of digital skills across all areas of learning (Welsh Government, 2024).

The benefits of storytelling often depend on the storyteller's ability, behaviours and techniques such as the use of voice, gestures, timing, pace, confidence and delivery. Bruce, McNair and Whinnett (2020) and Cremin *et al.* (2016) agree that skilled storytelling enhances children's engagement and helps create rich language environments that support literacy development.

This essay explores specific skills and behaviours observed in both the traditional audio recording of *The Gruffalo* and its digital version, with particular focus on the gestures and actions used by the narrator, the use of rhyme in storytelling and some of the advantages and limitations of both traditional and digital formats.

Gestures and actions used by the narrator

The National Literacy Trust (2023) describes storytelling as a key strategy for early oracy development, insisting that multimodal storytelling which includes gestures and actions is one of the most beneficial approaches. In agreement, Bowkett (2016) describes storytelling as more than simply reading a story, stating that adding behaviours such as gestures and actions helps develop children's communication and oracy skills. This emphasis on storytelling is reflected in the Curriculum for Funded

Non-Maintained Nursery Settings, which highlights that stories should be used as a way to develop early communication skills (Welsh Government, 2024). Non-verbal communication, typically expressed through physical movement of the hands, arms and face helps to express emotion, clarify speech and convey intention. Vila *et al.* (2019) and Hayes (2018) agree that gestures and actions are a large part of early communication and are vital in supporting early language development.

When used alongside spoken words, gestures and actions reinforce meaning and help children make sense of what is being said (Kern, 2023; Bowkett, 2016). This is especially beneficial for babies, pre-verbal children and those whose first language is not English. In a storytelling activity this means that even if children do not understand the meaning of individual words or phrases when spoken alone, they can still follow the story and participate through the visual and physical cues provided.

This is clearly demonstrated in the narrator's traditional storytelling video, where the narrator uses gestures such as waving goodbye, shaking her finger when saying "No," and rubbing her belly to emphasise "good to eat." These gestures and actions encourage children to copy, follow along and join in with the repetitive words that accompany the movements, supporting vocabulary development and clarity of speech. For example, the phrase "looked good" is used in the story to mean "good enough to eat." However, this phrase could be interpreted in different ways. The narrator supports clarity by using a simple, exaggerated gesture - rubbing her belly, which helps children understand the intended meaning. This demonstrates what Florit-Pons *et al.* (2022) believe: that gestures and actions are not merely supportive but integral to oracy development in early childhood. However, Hayes (2018) offers a more cautious perspective, arguing that using gestures without accompanying words is overly simplistic and less beneficial to the learner. While gestures can support comprehension, they are most effective when integrated with spoken language to create a rich, multimodal learning experience.

The use of gesture to support language and oracy development closely reflects Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), which emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive growth. Vygotsky proposed that children learn most effectively when supported by more knowledgeable others, typically adults who use tools such as

spoken language, physical gestures and shared activities to facilitate learning within the Zone of Proximal Development. Building on these ideas, Jerome Bruner (1983) introduced the concept of scaffolding, highlighting how language, interaction and gesture can support children's learning, particularly in storytelling. He also identified three modes of representation, the first being enactive representation, where children learn through movement and physical engagement such as joining in with gestures and familiar language.

Gestures and actions support early reading skills by helping children understand, internalise and remember new vocabulary. Being animated while speaking, especially when combined with gestures encourages the narrator to sound out words clearly and expressively. When used repeatedly throughout a story, gestures act as visual cues that reinforce meaning and support word recognition. In addition to reinforcing vocabulary, gestures help children make important connections between spoken and written language. Actions such as pointing to words while reading, running a finger from left to right and modelling how to turn pages introduce children to the mechanics of reading. These behaviours support print awareness and directional tracking which are key components of emergent literacy (The Reading Specialists, 2024; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2024.). These types of gestures and actions can be seen throughout the narrator's traditional version of the story. Using a multimodal approach with gestures, movement and expression can makes story time more engaging and enjoyable. As Merga (2017) notes, when children enjoy reading experiences, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward reading, which influences their long-term literacy habits. The narrator attempts to interject a sense of fun and enjoyment in both versions of the story; however, this is more effectively achieved in the traditional version. This may be due to several factors such as the narrator's greater experience with traditional storytelling, the freedom of physical movement, not being confined to a small screen window and the influence of the surrounding environment.

The use of rhyme in storytelling

Stories with rhyming patterns such as the one chosen by the narrator, which resembles nursery rhymes with repeated phrases and a consistent rhythm are more than just fun word activities; they are tools for supporting children's development in speech, language and communication (Lee, 2024; BBC, n.d.). As early literacy skills begin with listening and speaking before progressing to reading and writing, rhyming stories play a foundational role in language acquisition (Ranson, 2016). Their repetitive and rhythmic nature helps children tune into the sounds of language, which is essential for developing phonological awareness. This awareness enables children to understand how words are made up of smaller sound units, laying the groundwork for oracy and literacy (Maclean, Bryant and Bradley, 1987). According to Maureen, van der Meija and de Jonga (2022) storytelling activities that include rhyme and repetition significantly enhance early literacy outcomes, especially when paired with interactive elements.

Rhyming stories also give children the opportunity to anticipate what comes next, encouraging active participation and engagement. This predictability builds confidence, particularly in group settings where children feel more comfortable joining in when they know what to expect. Repeating rhymes and phrases strengthen memory, attention and concentration which are key cognitive skills that support learning across all areas (Webber, 2021; Lee, 2024).

David Crystal (2001) discusses the importance of rhyme, rhythm and repetition within language play and storytelling, all of which help develop phonological awareness through playful engagement and meaningful experiences. He believes that these elements not only make language enjoyable but also support children's early literacy and speech development by enhancing their ability to recognise sound patterns and structure. In contrast, Noam Chomsky (2006) believed that children do not require playful experiences to develop language. Instead, he proposed that the acquisition of language is biologically pre-programmed, a term he called Universal Grammar. According to Chomsky, children are born with the capacity to learn language and exposure to linguistic input simply activates this internal system.

Advantages and limitations of both traditional and digital formats

One clear benefit of digital storytelling is that it allows children to access stories independently. While ideally stories would be shared by caregivers or parents, research shows that fewer parents are reading to their children than in previous generations (HarperCollins,2023). As a result, children are increasingly turning to digital devices for learning at younger ages.

In the digital version of *The Gruffalo*, the narrator incorporates gestures alongside spoken words, helping maintain engagement. However, the impact of these gestures could be improved if the narrator appeared larger within the frame, allowing children to better observe and mimic the actions. Maureen *et al.* (2022) found that digital storytelling can be effective for early literacy development, especially when visual and gestural elements are clearly presented.

Recent research by Delgado *et al.* (2018) suggests that learners gain better reading skills from paper-based resources compared to digital ones. This may be due to distractions and scrolling behaviours commonly associated with digital devices, which can interfere with sustained attention and comprehension. However, the Neuhaus Education Center (2024) argues that digital literacy tools, such as eBooks offer an additional layer of engagement that traditional books may lack. These tools can include interactive features, audio narration and visual enhancements that support diverse learning styles and increase motivation to read.

Conclusion

As part of this assignment, it was necessary to use AI-generated programmes to source information for the main body of the essay. Since AI is a relatively new concept, particularly for the writer, it was sometimes challenging to find specific and relevant information. Overall, AI appeared to be quick and precise; however, many of the summaries provided were interpreted differently than the writer would have expected. Additionally, the sources offered by AI were not always the writer's preferred type, such

as non-academic websites as well as some of links being outdated or no longer accessible.

For quick answers and proofreading AI proved to be a useful tool. Nevertheless, the writer still prefers traditional methods, such as reading books and locating articles independently. One notable difference AI made to the writer's research process is that it helped prevent going off topic or falling into rabbit holes driven by personal interests. As beneficial as this is, it is not always as interesting for the writer.

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