

ECEY5004: Language and Literacy in the Digital Age**Portfolio****Contents:**

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AI Declaration -

I acknowledge the use of Google Scholar [<https://scholar.google.com/>] between period:

(29/09/2025) - (26/10/2025) to help search for relevant academic journals and literature which are not always available via the university online library.

The following prompts were used:

- Language, Literacy and Writing development in the Early Years
- Storytelling in the Early Years
- The role of gestures in storytelling
- The role of rhyme, repetition and music in storytelling

I can confirm that I utilised AI (Co Pilot) to generate images of characters that were used in my digital storytelling activity (Brown Bear). AI (Co Pilot) was also used to provide summaries of academic journal articles.

I confirm that I have not presented any other AI generated text as my own work. I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide as evidence.

Links to Recorded Activities:

[ECEY5004 - Language and Literacy in the Digital Age - Traditional Storytelling Activity \(Twas The Night Before Christmas\).mp4](#)

[ECEY5004 - Language and Literacy in the Digital Age - Digital Storytelling Activity \(Brown Bear\).mp4](#)

Language and Literacy in the Digital Age - Self-reflective Analysis

Introduction

A child's understanding and ability to use language develops rapidly during the early years, a period of intense cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Dickinson and Morse, 2019). This development begins even before birth, as infants *in utero* are sensitive to rhythm, intonation, and melody in speech (Rämä-Ory, 2022) and begin to recognise sound patterns of their mother's language (Abboub *et al.*, 2016). Through language, children make sense of their world, interpreting visual and verbal messages that form the foundation for later reading and writing (Wyse *et al.*, 2018).

A range of factors influence language development, including language modelling (Neaum, 2012), interactive exchanges between adults and children (Hayes, 2016), and responsive communication that promotes turn-taking and shared attention (Romeo *et al.*, 2018; Early Years Wales, 2018). Gross (2018) describes this early interaction as a "serve and return" process, in which adults notice and respond to gestures, facial expressions, and vocalisations to co-construct meaning. Other influences include opportunities for imaginative play (Haoyue and Oyam, 2024), and exposure to rich oral language environments (Welsh Government, 2025).

Among these matters, storytelling plays a distinctive role. Wyse *et al.*, describe storytelling as 'a powerful shared experience' through which 'the telling, retelling, writing and reading of stories open a rich vein of language' (Wyse *et al.*, 2018, p. 49). Storytelling introduces children to new vocabulary, sentence patterns, and narrative structure, while also fostering empathy and imagination (Dubiel, 2024). It supports both receptive and expressive language, providing opportunities for listening, prediction, and verbal participation (Hayes, 2016).

The growth of digital technology has expanded the ways stories are told and shared (International Literacy Association, 2019). Digital storytelling, video readings, and interactive picture books can make language learning more accessible, yet researchers warn that they should complement, not replace, live human interaction (Morrison, 2024), and that more research into the effectiveness of digital storytelling on children's language development is needed (Encarnacion and Marquez, 2025).

This essay examines two key storytelling behaviours observed in the recorded activities: the use of gesture and the incorporation of rhyme, repetition, and music. Each is discussed in relation to its contribution to early language, literacy, writing, and digital literacy development.

The Role of Gestures in Storytelling

Gestures are movements of the hands, arms, or body that convey meaning alongside or in place of speech and are among the earliest forms of communication (Novack and Goldin-Medow 2017; Prieur *et al.*, (2020), evident even before children can talk, for example, when a baby stretches out their arms to be picked up (Fitzhenry and Murphy, 2017). This early interaction reflects the “serve and return” process described by Gross (2018), in which adults respond to a child’s signals to build shared meaning. Research shows that gestures enhance oracy, literacy, and writing by linking language to physical action (Van der Mescht, 2023). Clark’s theory emphasises that drama, role play, and creative movement support children’s understanding of words and stories by connecting language to experience (Clark, 2016). Within storytelling, gestures serve a similar purpose, transforming abstract words into visible, embodied experiences that children can observe, imitate, and internalise (Flewitt, 2017).

In the recorded storytelling of *’Twas the Night Before Christmas* (Moore, 2023), gesture played a central role in supporting comprehension and engagement. As the poem was performed, sweeping arm movements illustrated the movement of St Nicholas’ sleigh and the sequence of events. These gestures provided visual scaffolding for vocabulary that might otherwise be unfamiliar, helping children to construct meaning through observation (Wyse *et al.*, 2018). Such non-verbal cues are particularly valuable for multilingual learners or children with emerging vocabulary, as they provide an accessible pathway into spoken language (Dickinson *et al.*, 2019).

Gestures also enhance expressive communication. The storyteller’s use of movement, tone, and facial expression demonstrated that language conveys emotion as well as information. Abboub *et al.*, (2016) found that infants are attuned to rhythm and melody in speech, and that pairing poetic techniques with gesture strengthens comprehension and expressive fluency.

Gestures further supported the understanding of the story structure in *’Twas the Night Before Christmas*. Pointing to different parts of the scene when describing actions such as St Nicholas “laying his finger aside of his nose” or “springing to his sleigh” helped anchor the sequence of events (Wyse *et al.*, 2018). Dramatic gestures and changes in vocal tone created a sense of performance that sustained attention and immersion. Paley’s work on story acting demonstrates that when children embody roles, they explore motives and emotions, connecting linguistic and emotional understanding (Flewitt *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, Clark (2016) argues that role play and movement deepen empathy and engagement with narrative meaning.

Embodied storytelling also supports socio-emotional development (Mardell and Swan, 2017). The gesture of offering a prop, such as the bowl of snow (as seen in *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* recording), encouraged turn-taking and shared attention, mirroring the reciprocity of conversation. Acting out stories allows children to link words with actions and to express emotion physically, building emotional literacy (Nicolopoulou *et al.*, 2015). Gesturing excitement, anticipation, or surprise gives children tools to communicate feelings non-verbally, supporting both social and communicative growth (Lysaker, 2019).

Gestures are closely connected to cognition and memory. Large movements that mimic St Nicholas coming “down the chimney with a bound”, or smaller gestures such as the “prancing and pawing of each little hoof” can help with activating cognitive processes that reinforce comprehension and recall. Combining auditory, visual, and kinaesthetic input supports learning in a variety of modes, which is particularly effective in early childhood (Flewitt, 2017). When children observe and later reproduce storytelling gestures, they link movement to linguistic meaning, turning from passive listeners into active participants (Dargue and Sweller, 2020).

The connection between gesture and early writing is also significant. Lysaker (2019) observes that children use gesture, gaze, and body positioning to enact meaning while engaging with stories, demonstrating that literacy is an embodied process. Appropriate gestures at key points - such as pointing and sweeping - support the bridge between oral storytelling and early written representation (Lysaker, 2019; Rowe, 2019). In the recorded performance, hand movements that traced shapes or outlined objects such as the “smoke encircling” St Nicholas’s head “like a wreath” modelled this symbolic process, showing how ideas can be externalised and shared. Encouraging gesture during early mark-making can ease the transition from speech to writing, and recent studies show that digital writing techniques have not yet replaced traditional handwriting methods in the effectiveness of supporting the development of language and literacy for young children (Kalchhauser-Cunha *et al.*, 2025).

Gestures also make storytelling more inclusive by offering multiple modes of participation. Systems such as Makaton combine speech, sign, and symbol to support comprehension for children with speech or language delays, as well as for those who process information more effectively through visual or kinaesthetic means (Larkin, 2021). In both *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* (Moore, 2023) and *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Martin and Carle, 1997) gestures, particularly hand movements, were used throughout which would support

engagement from all children, including those with emerging bilingual skills or neurodivergent communication styles.

Practitioners' confidence in using gesture and dramatisation is therefore essential, with professional storytellers such as Michael Rosen offering useful tips for adults to keep children engaged when listening to stories (Book Trust, 2022). As Clark (2016) emphasises, children respond most positively when storytelling is animated, expressive, and relational. When educators embody stories through movement, gesture, and tone, they model creativity and help children experience language as dynamic and social (Mardell and Swann, 2017).

The Use of Rhyme, Repetition, and Music in Storytelling

Rhyme, repetition, and music are integral to early storytelling and play a vital role in developing children's language, literacy, and writing (Gross, 2018; Dickinson, 2019). They help children recognise and predict sound patterns, strengthen memory, build vocabulary, and develop confidence with words (Rosati, 2024; British Broadcasting Company, 2025). Crystal (1989) identifies rhythm and melody as key features of how children first engage with spoken language, arguing that sound and pattern form the foundation for later reading and writing. Through rhyme and song, children become attuned to the musical qualities of speech and learn to recognise, anticipate, and reproduce the sounds that structure words and sentences (Tsao *et al.*, 2023).

In both *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* (Moore, 2023) and *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Martin and Carle, 2023), rhyme and repetition provided an organising structure that supported comprehension and engagement. In the poem by Moore, pairs such as "mouse" and "house" or "bed" and "head" helped children hear recurring sound patterns, supporting phonological awareness. In *Brown Bear*, the predictable rhythm and repeating sentence pattern encouraged participation and prediction. Recognising rhyme also aids spelling and decoding, as children learn that similar sounds often share letter patterns (Wyse *et al.*, 2018). These experiences can promote playful exploration of sound and word structure, encouraging creative language use.

Repetition reinforces vocabulary and syntax by providing repeated exposure to grammatical patterns in meaningful contexts (Gross, 2018; British Broadcasting Company, 2025). In *Brown Bear*, the recurring question "What do you see?" enabled children to anticipate responses and join in verbally, which can promote confidence and expressive fluency. In *'Twas the Night Before*

Christmas, rhythmic repetition helped sustain attention and recall. Crystal (1989) notes that rhythm in speech helps children internalise language patterns, aiding fluency and comprehension.

Music further enhances storytelling by engaging emotion and pacing. Musical rhythm activates neural pathways associated with memory and language (Ren and Brown, 2024); while singing or chanting encourages expressive speech and fluency (Sutton Music Trust, 2023). In both recordings, variation in pitch, tone, and tempo created musicality that distinguished sections of the story and highlighted emotional moments. Mahmood (2025) found that musical rhymes in kindergarten enhance literacy as well as cognitive and emotional skills. Rosati (2024) similarly found that nursery rhymes help children link rhythm with story structure, while Hall (2024) shows that melody makes language memorable and emotionally engaging.

Music integrates naturally with gesture and movement, linking auditory patterns to physical experience. This multimodal connection strengthens comprehension and recall by engaging multiple senses. When children move in rhythm with words or songs, they embody story patterns, learning through coordination of hearing, movement, and speech (Laure and Habe, 2024).

Rhyme, rhythm, and repetition can also contribute to early writing skills by helping children internalise story sequence. Predictable phrasing provides a framework for understanding beginnings, middles, and endings (Rosati, 2024). When children retell or invent stories, they often reproduce rhythmic or repetitive structures, echoing the language of the texts they have heard (Mardell and Swann, 2017).

Although the benefits of rhyme, repetition, and music are widely recognised, research also highlights certain challenges. Overemphasis on memorisation can make learning mechanical rather than creative, limiting children's expressive language (Zhong and Guo, 2023). Some traditional rhymes rely on English sound patterns not shared by other languages, which can disadvantage bilingual learners (Rosati, 2024). Music may also distract from narrative meaning if not clearly linked to learning objectives (Mahmood, 2025). While rhyme supports phonological awareness, it does not automatically lead to writing fluency without explicit teaching of how sound connects to print (Early Intervention Foundation, 2022).

In both *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* and *Brown Bear*, rhyme and rhythm worked alongside gesture and expression to create rich, multisensory learning experiences. As Crystal (1986) observed, the musicality of language provides a natural pathway for learning. When used

thoughtfully, rhyme, repetition, and music transform storytelling into an interactive and creative process that nurtures curiosity, confidence, and a lasting love of language.

Conclusion

Several sources were particularly valuable in developing this paper. *Storytelling in Early Childhood* by Cremin *et al.*, (2017) offered theoretical and practical insights into the pedagogical value of storytelling, helping to link the recorded activities with research on creativity, participation, and the social nature of language learning. *Teaching English, Language and Literacy* by Wyse *et al.* (2018) was equally influential, providing a clear explanation of how early oral language and sound awareness underpin later reading and writing. Together, these texts helped connect theory and practice, deepening understanding of how gesture, rhyme, repetition, and music support literacy development from the earliest years.

Artificial intelligence tools were used only to generate illustrative images for the *Brown Bear* activity and to summarise selected journal articles. All interpretation, evaluation, and synthesis of sources were conducted independently.

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