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**Module: Language and Literacy in the
Digital Age**

(ECEY5004)

AI Cover Sheet

I acknowledge my use of Grammarly to help with grammar and spelling.

I acknowledge my use of Co-pilot to check for repetition and rephrase work to help bring the word count down.

I acknowledge my use of Co-Pilot to help with research to support my work, using prompts such as find me recent information that talks about the benefits of storytime, articles and journals about behaviours during storytelling, how does it promote literacy and oracy, I also asked for sources that talk about facial expression in early years and other storytime behaviours.

I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before and after using AI tools, which I may be asked to provide as evidence.

Here is the link to my recording of storytime (traditional and digital):

[Storytelling book and digital.mov](#)

Part 2.

Storytelling in early years is essential for nurturing language, emotional understanding, and cognitive development. It helps children make sense of the world and express themselves with confidence and empathy (Dubiel, n.d.). Maureen, van der Meij, and de Jong (2022) explain that storytelling builds vocabulary, supports emotional growth, and helps children express feelings and understand others. It encourages creativity, improves listening and speaking skills, and, when paired with digital tools, offers diverse ways to learn.

Storytelling plays a vital role in literacy development. It helps children understand story structure, express ideas clearly, and develop narrative skills. Maureen, van der Meij, and de Jong (2022) found that digital storytelling boosts comprehension and emotional expression, while their earlier study (2020) showed that combining storytelling with play-based learning improves digital literacy and encourages creative thinking. Carr *et al.* (2023) highlighted how caregiver-led storytelling strengthens language development and promotes rich, interactive conversations. Schull *et al.* (2021) emphasized that storytelling helps children make meaning, connect ideas, and develop early reading and writing skills.

These findings align with the Welsh Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (2022), which promotes literacy through oracy, comprehension, and emergent writing, while also supporting emotional development and positive relationships.

Storytelling fosters both traditional and digital literacy through expressive behaviours such as vocal modulation, tonal variation, and facial expressions. Buczko (2020) defines oracy as the ability to speak and listen well—a skill essential for learning, relationships, and future success.

One key storytelling behaviour is expressive voice. In a recent recording, the practitioner showed very good use of expressive voice, using shifts in pitch, tone, volume, and

rhythm to bring the story to life and engage children emotionally. Reality Pathing (2025) explains that developing expressive voice in early childhood fosters strong communication, fluent reading, and comprehensive language development. These vocal shifts help children convey emotions, engage listeners, and interpret meaning. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) also highlights how language shapes thought through social interaction. When storytellers vary their voice, they demonstrate how speech carries meaning, an essential component of phonological awareness and early reading (Alkilani & Zhang, 2025). Jean Aitchison (2000) supports this view by emphasising that vocal variation is biologically and socially rooted, playing a crucial role in meaning-making and emotional connection. Her exploration of speech evolution shows that expressive vocal patterns such as those found in storytelling are vital for developing communicative competence and social bonding.

This was clear in the practitioner's delivery, where expressive voice was paired with gesture and facial expression to scaffold children's emotional understanding and maintain attention. Such multimodal storytelling aligns with trauma-informed practice, supporting emotional regulation and relational safety. However, Noam Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar, cited in Abbas and Yaseen (2022), argues that children are born with built-in language knowledge. This means expressive voice may help children use language, but it doesn't shape the deeper rules they already know. Vaahtoranta *et al.* (2019) found that engaging children as active participants in storytelling, especially when stories were delivered with expressive voice and elaboration, significantly boosted vocabulary development. Dramatic storytelling activates deeper cognitive processing, leading to better retention and recall.

Reality Pathing (2025) further notes that expressive voice supports oracy by helping children communicate emotions, interpret meaning, and engage socially. This aligns with the Welsh Curriculum's emphasis on confident verbal expression through voice, gesture, and movement (Curriculum for Wales, 2022). Educators who model expressive voice help children understand how speech conveys meaning, supporting both literacy and oracy development (Alkilani & Zhang, 2025).

In bilingual settings, expressive voice supports both English and Welsh language development, contributing to Cymraeg 2050 goals through playful, immersive

communication (Welsh Government, 2017). In the recording, the practitioner used both Welsh and English expressively, modelling bilingual storytelling that reinforced vocabulary, rhythm, and emotional nuance across languages. Eric Lenneberg's critical period hypothesis (1967), reaffirmed in recent research by Siahaan (2022), suggests that early childhood is the optimal window for acquiring multiple languages. This makes expressive, immersive storytelling in both languages especially effective for phonological and expressive development.

Facial expression and nonverbal communication, such as gesture, are foundational storytelling behaviours that support oracy development. Mehrabian's communication model (1971) suggests that up to 93% of emotional meaning is conveyed nonverbally. (Mehrabian, 2017). In early years settings, exaggerated expressions help decode feelings and intentions, supporting emotional literacy and empathy. Before children develop fluent speech, they rely on visual and emotional cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and tone to interpret meaning and engage socially (Changing Faces, 2022a). These behaviours help children recognise emotions, build empathy, and understand how spoken language conveys intent and feeling.

Recent research reinforces this view. Rzaeva (2025) found that expressive gestures and facial cues significantly improved vocabulary retention and interaction in the classrooms, suggesting that embodied communication enhances both comprehension and confidence. Doherty (2023) argues that oracy is not merely verbal fluency but a multimodal skillset involving voice, gesture, and movement, which together foster clarity, confidence, and emotional resonance. The Education Endowment Foundation (2023) highlights that communication approaches incorporating nonverbal interaction can accelerate progress by up to seven months. In storytelling contexts, these behaviours help children connect emotionally with characters, anticipate narrative shifts, and develop the confidence to express themselves in front of others (Oakway Academy, 2023). As Care Learning (2023) notes, extending children's development through both verbal and nonverbal communication is essential for inclusive, responsive teaching. These strategies align with the Welsh Curriculum's goal of nurturing expressive, confident communicators who present ideas through voice, movement, and facial expression.

This was clearly demonstrated in practice, where the practitioner made effective use of facial expressions and gestures to support children's engagement and understanding. Their animated storytelling style helped scaffold meaning, model different emotions, and encourage children's own expressive contributions directly reflecting the research and curriculum aims outlined above.

This approach is supported by Embodied Cognition Theory, which posits that physical actions such as gestures are integral to cognitive processing and language development. Goldin-Meadow's research suggests that children often gesture before they can articulate ideas verbally, indicating that gesture scaffolds thought and speech (Goldin-Meadow, 2015).

However, Pang, Zhou, and Chu (2024) highlight that in culturally diverse academic contexts, nonverbal behaviours including gestures, can be misinterpreted or distracted from intended meaning, especially when indirect communication is involved. This underscores the importance of aligning gestures and expressions with situational expectations to enhance clarity rather than diminish it.

Participation in storytelling offers a rich context for developing oracy in early childhood. When children engage in co-narration, respond to prompts, and contribute personal reflections, they become active meaning-makers. This aligns with Bruner's (1990) theory of narrative as a mode of thought, where children construct understanding through shared stories. In early years settings, storytelling becomes a social and emotional practice, helping children explore language, identity, and empathy.

Recent research highlights the importance of storytelling as a foundation for oracy. Voice 21 (2023b) emphasises that high-quality oracy provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage requires deliberate modelling of vocabulary, social communication, and collaborative talk. These principles were clearly demonstrated in the recording, where the practitioner invited children to participate actively in the storytelling process. Children were prompted to jump such as frogs, sing, and respond to questions, transforming passive listening into embodied co-performance. This kind of physical involvement supports Kress's (2010) multimodal theory, which suggests that children use gesture, movement, and voice to help them understand and communicate.

Participation in storytelling also supports emotional literacy. According to Dubiel (n.d.), storytelling helps children express their ideas and feelings, but only when stories feel authentic and inclusive. This was evident in the recording, where children were asked questions, suggested ideas, and reshaped the narrative collaboratively. Gill (2025a) reinforces this, noting that child-led storytelling fosters empathy, reduces bias, and gives every child the tools to understand and celebrate difference. These interactions reflect Hibbin (2016) view of storytelling as a dialogic process, where children and adults share ideas and reshape stories together.

Questioning during storytelling plays a vital role in developing oracy and deeper thinking. The Oakway Academy Oracy Toolkit (2023) highlights that encouraging children to articulate ideas, ask questions, and explore hypotheses builds confidence and fluency in communication.

During the digital story, it was noted that children's participation was encouraged more than in the traditional storytelling. There were times when children were encouraged to move and join in singing. When digital tools, are used intentionally, they can enhance engagement and support oracy. However, Voice 21 (2023a) cautions that digital tools should enrich and not replace human interaction and thoughtful modelling.

Participatory storytelling requires skilled facilitation. Gill (2025b) argues that inclusive storytelling must be actively designed to support neurodivergent and disabled children, using differentiated prompts and sensory supports to ensure every child can contribute meaningfully. This aligns with guidance from Anna Freud Centre (2023), which advocates for neuro-affirming practice that recognises diverse communication styles and emotional needs.

Trauma-informed practice also reminds us that emotional safety is foundational. Pearse (2023) explains that nurturing children's hearts and minds in early years settings requires inclusive, trauma-aware approaches that offer choice, trust, and connection. The National Children's Bureau (2025) adds that trauma-informed environments must be built on empathy, safety, and relationships, ensuring that storytelling never forces participation but gently invites it.

Another behaviour observed in the recording was onomatopoeia; the practitioner used a story with onomatopoeic words, the practitioner used sounds as “chuchu” and “clicity clac”. Onomatopoeic words that sound such as the noise they describe are a powerful tool in early years storytelling. These sound-rich words help children link language to sensory experiences, making stories more vivid and easier to understand. Motamedi *et al.* (2020) found that onomatopoeic words are often among the first spoken by children because they are fun to say and closely match real-world sounds. This supports phonological development and helps children experiment with pitch, rhythm, and tone, key elements of oracy.

Catherine Laing (2019) adds that the iconic nature of onomatopoeia makes these words inherently learnable, prompting early production and boosting confidence in speech. Vygotsky’s theory of social interaction supports this, showing that children learn language best through shared, playful experiences. Bruner (1986) also highlights the importance of narrative in helping children make sense of the world. Onomatopoeia adds texture and emotion to those stories, making them more engaging. Tomasello’s usage-based theory (2003) suggests that children learn language through repeated, meaningful use exactly what happens when they hear and repeat sound-rich words in stories.

Storytelling that includes onomatopoeia encourages expressive communication. According to Tales Toolkit (n.d.) when children co-create stories using sound-rich language, they engage in high-quality interactions that strengthen vocabulary and communication skills. Voice 21 (2024) highlights that spoken language at age five is a strong predictor of later academic success, making oracy development in the early years a vital foundation.

However, while onomatopoeia is engaging and developmentally useful, it should be balanced with other forms of language. Over-reliance on sound effects may limit opportunities for children to explore more complex vocabulary or sentence structures. As Voice 21 (2024) explains, oracy development begins well before children enter formal schooling, and early experiences with spoken language shape confidence, vocabulary, and expressive skills. Children benefit most when exposed to a rich mix of descriptive, emotional, and functional language through storytelling and conversation. So while

“bang!” and “whoosh!” are brilliant for grabbing attention, they work best when woven into broader storytelling that models full sentences, feelings, and social interactions—laying the foundation for lifelong learning.

Digital storytelling expands literacy opportunities by offering multiple modes of engagement spoken narration, images, and interactive features. These tools support early readers, multilingual learners, and children with language difficulties. Features such as audio, word explanations, and onscreen tips help children understand vocabulary and story structure while introducing them to digital reading. They also foster digital literacy by teaching children to navigate help functions, interact with story content, and explore their identities as readers and writers in online spaces. Platforms such as Kindle and iPads allow teachers to add notes and adjust visual settings to meet diverse learning needs (Kucirkova, 2018, p. 62–63).

In preparing this essay, I used AI to support the research process, especially in finding relevant academic sources. The tool was useful for getting started, though I did face some limitations. Several links were broken or inaccessible, so I had to be specific and persistent in refining my searches. This showed how important clarity is when using AI-assisted tools.

The sources offer a balanced mix of theory, research, and practical insight into how children develop language and communication. Classic theorists such as Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1986, 1990), and Tomasello (2003) helped explain how social interaction shapes learning. These were complemented by newer studies such as Alkilani and Zhang (2025) and Maureen *et al.* (2020, 2022), which highlight the role of storytelling and literacy in modern classrooms.

Practical sources from the Education Endowment Foundation (2023), Voice 21 (2023, 2024), and the Welsh Government (2022) linked theory to current teaching practice. Guides from the Anna Freud Centre (2023) and Changing Faces (2022b) added valuable insights on inclusion and neurodiversity.

Although some links were unavailable, I worked to find accurate versions and check information carefully. The mix of classic and current sources made the research both reliable and relevant to today’s early education settings.

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