



Language and Literacy in the Digital Age ECEY5004

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Basic Acknowledgement format of AI tool use:

I acknowledge the use of Microsoft Copilot (<https://copilot.microsoft.com>) on 21 October 2025 to support the development of my essay analysing traditional and digital storytelling techniques in early childhood education.

I used the prompt(s):

1. *Please check grammar, structure and flow of my essay on storytelling techniques.*
2. *Help me evaluate the sources I used to support my essay.*

I confirm that I have not presented any 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.

Traditional story telling link: [Recap: Meeting with Nicola Carr \(2415256\) 19 October | Meeting | Microsoft Teams](#)

Digital story telling link: [we're going on a bear hunt digital version 2.mp4](#)

This analysis explores the pedagogical value of storytelling for children from pre-birth to age seven, examining both traditional and digital storytelling approaches. It evaluates how expressive reading promotes language, literacy and emotional development, and reflects on my own practice as a narrator through the story *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (Rosen & Oxenbury, 1993). The discussion is supported by key theorists, educational policy, and Welsh curriculum guidance.

Storytelling plays a vital role in supporting children's language and literacy development from the earliest stages of life (Trelease, 2019). Research has shown that exposure to rhythm, sound, and intonation begins before birth, as foetuses can distinguish their mother's voice and prosodic patterns in the final trimester (Partanen *et al.*, 2013). This early auditory experience lays the groundwork for later phonological awareness, a key foundation for reading and speech development (Goswami, 2015). From birth onwards, repeated storytelling and shared book reading support language acquisition, emotional bonding, and cognitive growth (Trelease, 2019; Nicolopoulou *et al.*, 2015). Through the comforting rhythm of familiar stories, babies begin to attune to speech sounds, facial expressions, and turn-taking, all of which underpin future communication (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1983).

The early years are a sensitive period for neural and linguistic development, and storytelling acts as a bridge between sound and meaning (Chomsky, 1965; Bruner, 1983). Chomsky (1965) theory of an innate *Language Acquisition Device* (LAD) suggests children are biologically prepared to learn language, yet it is through interaction that this potential is realized (Vygotsky, 1978). Bruner's (1983) concept of the *Language Acquisition Support System* (LASS) highlights the caregiver's role in structuring and modelling language through repeated patterns, routines, and narrative play. In storytelling sessions, adults scaffold children's understanding by emphasising rhythm, repetition, and narrative sequence thus helping them internalise grammatical and semantic structures naturally (Wasik, Hindman and Snell, 2016).

Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning occurs first on a social level before becoming internalised, and storytelling exemplifies this process. When adults read expressively, ask open questions, or pause for prediction, they operate within the child's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), helping children develop their language skills through shared storytelling (Wasik, Hindman and Snell, 2016). This interactional scaffolding illustrates how language learning is socially mediated and supported by adult modelling (Bruner, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978).

Beyond language, storytelling encourages emotional, imaginative and moral development (Nicolopoulou *et al.*, 2015). Stories provide a safe framework for children to explore feelings, relationships and ethical ideas, helping them make sense of complex social experiences (Dowdall *et al.*, 2020). Repetitive refrains such as "*We can't go over it, we can't go under it*" also help children anticipate and participate, supporting working memory, executive function and self-regulation (Dowdall *et al.*, 2020; Goswami, 2015). These rhythmic structures strengthen auditory processing and narrative recall, which are essential for later reading fluency and comprehension (Trelease, 2019; Noble *et al.*, 2020).

From a Welsh perspective, the *Curriculum for Wales* (Welsh Government, 2021) and the *Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings* (Welsh Government, 2025) emphasise the importance of storytelling and song in developing oracy, imagination and belonging. Storytelling also supports bilingual exposure and cultural identity, aligning with UNCRC Article 31, which recognises the child's right to participate in cultural and artistic life (UNICEF, 2022).

Overall, storytelling from pre-birth to age seven establishes the foundation for literacy, communication and emotional connection, nurturing listening and speaking as reciprocal processes and promoting social interaction essential for lifelong learning (Goswami, 2015; Welsh Government, 2021).

When reading to children aged 3–5, the narrator used expressive voice and nuanced prosody, varying pitch, rhythm, stress and pauses to highlight meaning, mark new vocabulary and sustain joint attention (Noble *et al.*, 2020). This expressive behaviour acts as scaffolding, guiding children through layers of meaning they might not yet access independently, in line with Vygotsky's (1978) concept that social interaction

and adult support enable learners to reach beyond their current capacity. The pedagogical value of rich intonation is supported by empirical evidence: Noble *et al.* (2020) found that interactive shared book reading with expressive adult talk significantly enhances preschoolers' vocabulary and inferencing skills, while Kory Westlund *et al.* (2017) reported that children exposed to expressive storytelling outperform peers who hear flat, monotone reading.

From a theoretical perspective, Bruner and Watson (1983) argue that meaning is co-constructed through narrative dialogue; expressive voice becomes a tool for engaging children in that process, directing attention to emotional, temporal and causal cues (Bruner and Watson, 1983). Likewise, Clark (1993) emphasises that contextual and visual cues support word learning, and expressive oral delivery amplifies this effect by increasing word salience. Aitchison (1997) expands this by explaining how children form semantic networks through three stages, labelling, packaging and network building, which can be strengthened through repeated, expressive and sensory storytelling. When reading *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, the narrator's gestures and repetition of sensory words such as "swish-swashy grass," "squelchy mud," and "swirling snowstorm" reinforced sound–action–visual links, supporting Aitchison's view that meaning grows through repeated contextual exposure (Aitchison, 1997; Noble *et al.*, 2020).

More recently, Cipolletti, Hayden and Thomas (2025) found that shared reading combining gestures, explicit vocabulary instruction and repetition significantly increased children's expressive vocabulary. This supports the idea that expressive voice is most effective when embedded in broader intentional teaching strategies rather than used in isolation (Cipolletti, Hayden and Thomas 2025). Similarly, Grøver *et al.* (2024) found that sustained use of expressive reading and dialogic discussion leads to long-term vocabulary and comprehension gains, demonstrating the lasting impact of interactive storytelling approaches (Grøver *et al.*, 2024).

In the video of *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, the narrator consciously used expressive tone, gesture and repetition to invite participation. At the beginning, the narrator encouraged the children to join in, prompting them with "When I say uh oh... we can't go over it, I want you to say, we can't go under it!", creating a shared rhythm and call-and-response interaction. This technique of encouraging joint attention and

active participation reflects the dialogic reading approach described by Whitehurst *et al.* (1988), in which children become co-narrators rather than passive listeners.

Throughout the delivery, the narrator paused intentionally to invite reflection (“Who likes running through long grass?”) and prediction (“What do you think will happen when we go through the river?”). These open prompts scaffolded comprehension by encouraging children to reason, describe and recall, consistent with Bruner’s (1983) view that narrative conversation supports conceptual thinking. Bruner proposed that through shared storytelling, children construct meaning socially by linking events, emotions and ideas into coherent mental frameworks. In this way, dialogue during storytelling acts as a scaffold, a temporary structure of language and interaction that helps children make sense of complex ideas, expand vocabulary and internalise reasoning patterns that underpin literacy (Bruner, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978). This perspective aligns with Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of social constructivism, which holds that learning first occurs through social interaction before becoming internalised. Together, these theorists show how guided dialogue and shared meaning-making enable children to progress from surface-level understanding to deeper conceptual awareness (Wasik, Hindman and Snell, 2016).

Gestures and movement mirrored the illustrations—*swish-swash, splish-splash*—helping children connect language with action. This reflects Paivio’s (1986) dual-coding theory, which proposes that information is better remembered when presented through both verbal and non-verbal channels. By combining auditory input (spoken words and rhythm) with visual and kinaesthetic cues (illustrations and actions), the narrator created multiple pathways for children to encode and retrieve meaning. Such multimodal interaction is especially powerful in early childhood, when sensory experience forms the foundation for conceptual understanding (Goswami, 2015; Aitchison, 1997).

The narrator’s use of movement also demonstrates principles of embodied cognition, recognising that learning is grounded in physical experience (Glenberg, 2010). Through imitation of gestures, children internalised language in a tangible way - literally “feeling” the story as they heard it (Glenberg, 2010). The pacing alternated between energetic sequences and calm reflection, modelling emotional regulation

and turn-taking, which support linguistic, cognitive and socio-emotional development (Dowdall *et al.*, 2020; Nicolopoulou *et al.*, 2015).

This storytelling approach reflects the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2021), particularly the Literacy, Languages and Communication Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE), which emphasises oracy, imagination and rich vocabulary through expressive, playful interaction. The framework encourages practitioners to design “creative, multimodal experiences” to support listening, speaking and understanding, elements evident in the narrator’s performance (Welsh Government, 2021; 2025). The Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings (Welsh Government, 2025) also highlights that children should “enjoy stories, songs and rhymes shared with enthusiasm and expression,” recognising that early engagement with language contributes to later reading fluency.

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The narrator’s practice additionally reflects UNCRC Articles 29 and 31, which affirm children’s rights to participate in cultural and artistic life and to develop their talents fully (UNICEF, 2022). By performing an interactive, expressive story, the narrator supported linguistic growth, imagination and well-being. Care Inspectorate Wales (2025) guidance further stresses providing experiences that promote communication, curiosity and connection, all of which were evident in the inclusive atmosphere created, every child could join in verbally or through gesture (Care Inspectorate Wales, 2025; Vygotsky, 1978).

Digital storytelling transforms traditional reading into a multimodal experience that blends sound, image and interaction (Flewitt, Messer and Kucirkova, 2015). In the narrator’s digital version of *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt*, the story was shared on screen through Clipchamp with background music (“Morning Coffee – Inspiring”), while expressive tone, gesture and rhythm remained central. The visuals and audio created a richer, more immersive experience that supported children’s attention, comprehension and emotional connection to the story (Kress, 2010, cited in

Insulander, 2011). Flewitt, Messer and Kucirkova, (2015) emphasise that digital storytelling enables young children to construct meaning through varied modes, spoken words, sound, movement and image, showing that early literacy extends beyond printed text.

The background music supported emotional connection and comprehension, illustrating Kress's view that meaning is built through multiple modes of communication (Kress, 2010, cited in Insulander, 2011). Showing the book's pages full-screen allowed children to follow both pictures and words, strengthening their awareness of print–speech correspondence (Bearne and Reedy, 2023). In contrast, during the live reading the physical book was harder for all children to see; their focus was drawn to the narrator's voice and gesture rather than the text itself. This demonstrates how each medium supports different learning strengths: the live version fostered social interaction and collective energy, while the digital version enhanced visibility, accessibility and focus on print.

Adding on-screen word highlighting timed with narration would further reinforce print tracking and decoding. Research confirms that e-books with dynamic text features improve children's comprehension and word reading (Takacs, Swart and Bus, 2015; Korat, 2010). These features are especially beneficial for children with additional learning needs, enabling them to pause or replay sections independently (Welsh Government, 2025).

This approach aligns with the Digital Competence Framework (Welsh Government, n.d.), particularly the "Producing" strand, which promotes purposeful use of technology to support communication. By designing the digital version, the narrator modelled creative, inclusive practice and placed the child at the centre, offering varied routes to meaning-making through sound, image, text and participation (Marsh *et al.*, 2021). The digital format complemented expressive teaching, encouraging listening, prediction and comprehension while nurturing confidence in using technology to tell stories. It therefore bridges traditional literacy with digital fluency and supports equitable access to storytelling for all learners.

This assignment has highlighted how expressive and digital storytelling contribute holistically to early literacy. Through theoretical application and reflective practice, it

demonstrated that effective storytelling integrates sound, movement, and dialogue to support language, emotional well-being, and creativity. Incorporating digital tools can further promote inclusion and engagement, preparing children for a world where communication spans multiple modes. As a practitioner, I will continue to refine both approaches, ensuring storytelling remains an inclusive, imaginative, and empowering experience for every child.

To support my analysis, I drew on a wide mix of sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed research, curriculum guidance, and digital media theory. The work of Vygotsky, Bruner, Aitchison, Clark, and Chomsky helped shape my understanding of how language develops through social interaction and exploration. I then connected these ideas with more recent studies, such as those by Noble *et al.* (2020), Cipolletti *et al.* (2025), and Grøver *et al.* (2024), which explore expressive storytelling and its impact on children's language growth. I also referred to Welsh Government and UNICEF guidance to make sure my approach linked with current educational frameworks.

Alongside traditional research, I found AI tools particularly helpful for quickly locating and comparing relevant studies, allowing me to build a broader and more up-to-date evidence base. I used Clipchamp to create my digital storytelling video, and Scholarcy to support my understanding of academic reading, as part of my supportive ALN package. I also used Google and Copilot to help me find and explore research more efficiently.

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