

Jordan MacDonald**Language and Literacy in the Digital Age portfolio.**

I acknowledge the use of Chat GPT, on multiple dates throughout the writing of this essay, details of how it has been used can be read in my conclusion.

I confirm that I have not presented and AI generated text as my own work. I confirm 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 in evidence.

Contents:

Component 1 – Traditional story (sent via email)

Component 2 – Digital story (sent via email)

Component 3 – Academic essay

Reference list

Component 3

Language acquisition theories

According to Neaum (2012) all children are born with the potential to acquire language, however, the skills required for language development are gained after birth through verbal interactions with caregivers, essentially language develops only when children hear words being spoken around them. In opposition to this, theorist Noam Chomsky, believed that children are born with an innate understanding of language and that this is possible as human brains are equipped with a “language acquisition device” which enables the brain to effortlessly absorb language (Chomsky and Aronoff, 2008; Open University, 1973). However, Skinner (1957) disagrees with Chomsky's theory and similarly to Neaum, Skinner also believed that language is influenced by those closest to children and that repeated interactions shape children's linguistic abilities, as opposed to having an innate ability as Chomsky suggests. Skinner highlighted the influence of positive reinforcement in his work saying that when the child attempts to speak are imitated by the caregiver,

these acknowledgments strengthen language attempts from the child (Brodie, 2024; Schoneberger, 2025).

Book Trust (2024) recognises the impact that books have in the growth of developing children's literacy skills. BookTrust (2020) says that storytelling can create opportunities for children and their caregivers to develop a deep-rooted attachment, and that early attachment paves the way for linguistic development. They highlight that it is not only the book content that helps children develop their language but the quality of the interaction from their caregiver. Lysaker (2019) agrees that the words are not always important, and that even books with only pictures provide opportunity for imagination and when the caregiver enjoys their reading this reflects the child's engagement levels, and in turn helps build foundational communication skills. Similarly, Dickinson and Morse (2019) say that storytelling from an early age builds strong emotional attachments and that the quality of the relationship directly affects the growth of the child's language development. The impact of strong attachments is highlighted in the work of John Bowlby, who says that early interactions have long lasting effects on children's social, emotional and cognitive growth (Bowlby, 2005). Lucarevski (2016) says that when caregivers truly enjoy reading with their child, the quality of the interaction will be greater resulting in higher engagement levels, which in turn strengthens literacy knowledge. UNICEF (2018) believe that stories can be enjoyed by all children regardless of disadvantage and that reading provides equal opportunities for learning. Conversely Welsh Government (2017) says that disadvantage does have an impact on children's language acquisition as studies have shown that children living in social housing are relying on parents who are not responding to their child's early language needs and that in some households communication is virtually non-existent, therefore impacting on essential language skills. This could be because families living in disadvantage, spend a lot more time worrying about factors such as financial hardship, resulting in lower interactions with their children, that in turn affects the quality of social interactions which directly affects the development of language acquisition (Dore, *et al.*, 2022; Law, *et al.*, 2017).

Early language development

Language acquisition is a process by which people learn to develop a language. This process naturally begins during pregnancy, whereby the baby will start to hear their first sounds, such as their mother's voice, and the voices of other familiar adults (The University of Sheffield, 2022). By the time babies are born they can usually recognise the tones and voices of those closest to them, it is recommended that caregivers talk and sing to their babies before birth to encourage early bonding and help develop early hearing skills (Public Health Scotland, 2023). Whitehead (2020) agrees that babies usually begin their journey trying to make sense of the sounds they hear from those closest to them, as relationships grow with their caregivers, the interactions offer rich opportunities to develop linguistic skills. Babies will often try to mimic the sounds they hear as a way of communicating, it is encouraged that caregivers also repeat the sounds baby makes back to them, this serves as a base for building conversation skills (NHS, 2020). Over time children will interpret the words they hear in meaningful ways, making connections between the words they hear and what those words mean. Eventually forming words themselves and putting those words into sentences, showing an understanding of the world around them. This demonstrates how language acquisition lays the foundations for future communication development (Dickinson and Morse, 2019).

Storytelling and early literacy

Bromley (2019) places emphasis on how storytelling in the classroom contributes to developing early literacy skills, drawing on how reading provides unique opportunities for children to immerse themselves in the adventure of stories, sparking imagination and wonder. Bromley also observed that when children feel comfortable in their environment, they are more likely to relax and contribute verbally to conversations surrounding stories they are interested in. This aligns with Maslow's (1943) theory that a sense of safety and belonging forms the foundations for personal growth and creativity. Furthermore, Maureen, Van der Meij and De Jong (2021) suggest that the foundations for literacy development begin within an oracy rich environment and that sharing a book and reading exposes the children to a wide range of vocabulary, which prompts conversation that can inform future planning to support literacy development.

Digital literacy and storytelling

The next aspect to consider is digital literacy. Reedy and Parker (2018) suggests that everyone should have or be working towards competence with digital tools, this is because the world is quickly growing in a way whereby digital competency is expected in everyday life, such as using a computer for work and or for education, technology is developing so quickly there are likely to be jobs in the future only available to those with digital literacy that have not yet been created, and so children are inevitably growing up in environments where they will be expected to use digital skills at some point. Furthermore, Fell (2010) has noticed the use of screen time has increased in recent years, she sees how digital storytelling has gained recognition as a valuable tool in early literacy development. Fell believes story telling using screens as a positive tool and talks about how nowadays people's attention span is becoming less, and that screens capture the attention of children by using visual symbols and pictures, she says that peoples brains respond to visual images more than text in a book and the brain actually holds visual images in their long term memory as opposed to reading stories traditionally where this information gets sent to a person's short term memory, this demonstrates one of the long term benefits in incorporating digital storytelling in the early years.

However, as technology develops there are some safeguarding concerns surrounding the risks involved in using technology on children's mental health (UNICEF, 2023), such as excessive screen time use and exposure to inappropriate content (Wandsworth Early Years, 2025). Conversely Reedy and Parker (2018) says that if practitioners monitor the use of online devices, using them for purposeful play and educational games this should avoid exposure to any unwanted content therefore supporting healthy brain development and digital literacy. Similarly, research by Madigan, *et al.* (2020) supports the use of technology when the quality of content supports language development, having said that, they note that children's exposure to screen time at home can negatively impact language development. An example of this is that some families claim to only provide educational content, yet research argues some online programmes are misleading, consequently leaving researchers questioning the quality of educational content children are using at home. Building on this, Radesky, *et al.* (2020) found that some children had access to their own personal devices at home subjecting them to excessive screen time, including inappropriate content, demonstrating the adverse effects of screen time.

These findings provide clear evidence to suggest that the use of digital resources has a place in supporting children's early literacy and language skills, use of digital technology appears to increase concentration and motivates learning through the enjoyment of using technology (Maureen, Van der Meij and De Jong, 2021).

However, the research consistently highlights technology should be used purposefully and in moderation (Maureen, Van der Meij and De Jong, 2021).; Madigan, S. *et al.*, 2020).

Repetition in storytelling

Attached to this essay are two examples of a practitioner storytelling, first a traditional style and second using digital tools. In both videos the practitioner has chosen books that use repetition. The use of repetition throughout the stories provides opportunities for audience participation, as the words and phrases are repeated, eventually children will notice this repetition and anticipate these patterns leading to actively join in (Nursery World, 2019). During the traditional storytelling the practitioner actively invites the children to participate in repeating the words that owl baby Bill says, by the reaction of the practitioner this is done successfully.

Department for Education (2022) says that by reading to children and encouraging their engagement they are more likely to be interested in the story, which helps develop their attention and listening skills. However, during the digital storytelling example, while repetition is present, the practitioner does not invite the children to repeat the rhymes, this could be because she does not have time to allow the children to repeat before the online story moves on. One could argue that the practitioner could have paused the video to encourage the children's involvement, that said, the story read aloud lasts nearly nine minutes and Shakibaie (2021) says that children's attention span can vary depending on a range of factors including the time of day and their mood and so the length of time this digital story has been read falls within the average time range suitable for a child in early years, any longer and the practitioner could risk losing the attention of the children. According to Piaget (1951) repeating words and phrases helps children to understand the concept of the words they hear.

Tone of voice in storytelling

In addition, Department of Education (2023) says that using different tones of voice while reading, helps build familiarity with characters and helps makes the meaning of the story clearer when the narrator expresses feeling through the tone in their voice. It can be observed from both example videos that the practitioner changes her voice to support different characters, her tone of voice also changes to match the emotional tone of the story, supported with facial expressions to help the listeners identify with the story (Aspire, 2025; Fell, 2010). Shaw (2021) says that when stories are read using these approaches children are usually able to better understand the story and can relate it to real life situations. Department of Education (2025) places responsibility on practitioners to provide enjoyable experiences that strengthen holistic growth and development highlighting the importance of developing language and vocabulary as a priority. This is because children who achieve foundational language skills are more likely to have a successful relationship with reading and writing in the future (Gilkerson, Richards and Topping, 2016). Through these storytelling exercises the practitioner has been able to demonstrate an example of these useful teaching approaches, which align with the expectations of the Department of Education.

Use of props in storytelling

Finally, The Hanen Centre (2024) states that reading to children is an important part of developing children's literacy but also points out how the use of props enhances a deeper understanding of the stories being read. During the traditional story video, the practitioner has chosen to use puppets to support the characters in the story as a way of helping children to stay engaged (Aspire, 2025; Palphreyman, 2019). Furthermore Mujahidah, Damayanti and Afiif (2021) highlight how the use of puppets give meaning to the words heard during the story. An example of this can be seen in the traditional story telling video, when the practitioner holds up mother owl when her name is being read, and when the practitioner acts out mother owl swooping while reading the word aloud, children can visually link the words being said with how the puppets are being used. During the digital storytelling video the practitioner has two cat puppets on display however chooses not to use them, it could be assumed that it would have been too difficult to include the use of props as she was using her hands to navigate the digital story, or another explanation may be that the images moving

around the screen were enough to keep the children engaged in the story, as was earlier discussed.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay ChatGPT was used to help find theorists that related to storytelling, language acquisition and literacy. Overall, the tool was helpful in providing names of relevant theorists and research. While not all reference links were useful, they served as a starting point to guide finding appropriate sources that have been used to reference some of this essay. ChatGPT was also used to help structure the paragraphs and titles for each section, which has improved the structure of this essay. ChatGPT provided alternative word suggestions, some of these were used to improve the academic sound of this essay, however none were copied directly into this work.

Reference list

Aspire (2025) *The Benefits of Storytelling in Early Childhood*, Aspire Early Learning. Aspire Early Education and Kindergarten. Available at: <https://www.aspireearlyeducation.vic.edu.au/resources/the-benefits-of-storytelling-in-early-childhood/>. (Accessed: 26 October 2025)

Barr, R., Kirkorian, H., Coyne, S. and Radesky, J. (2024) *Early childhood and digital media*. First edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bowlby, J. (2005) *A secure base : clinical applications of attachment theory*. Oxon [England: Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203440841>.

BookTrust (2020). *Why sharing stories supports bonding* Available at: <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/resources/find-resources/why-sharing-stories-supports-bonding/> (Accessed: 21 October 2025).

BookTrust (2024) *Reading in the Early Years: Why starting shared reading early matters*. Available at: <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/resources/find-resources/reading-in-the-early-years-why-starting-shared-reading-early-matters-and-the-role-of-bookstart-baby/>. (Accessed: 21 October 2025)

Bromley, T. (2019) 'Enhancing children's oral language and literacy development through storytelling in an early years classroom', *Practical Literacy: The Early &*

Primary Years, 24(1), pp. 6–8. Available at: <https://research-ebsco-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/linkprocessor/plink?id=c9b409b6-2e74-3aef-a4c3-aa07d9054048> (Accessed: 24 October 2025).

Brodie, K. (2024) *B.F. Skinner: Operant Conditioning and Behaviourism Theories*, Early Years TV. Available at: <https://www.earlyyears.tv/b-f-skinner-operant-conditioning-and-behaviourism-theories/>. (Accessed: 21 October 2025)

Chomsky, N. and Arnone, A. (2008) *The essential Chomsky*. New Press.

Department for Education (2022) *Help for early years providers : Listening and understanding, help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk*. Available at: <https://help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/areas-of-learning/communication-and-language/listening-and-understanding>. (Accessed: 25 October 2025).

Department of Education (2023) *Development Matters Non-statutory curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64e6002a20ae890014f26cbc/DfE_Development_Matters_Report_Sep2023.pdf?. (Accessed 25 October 2025)

Department for Education (2025) *Early years foundation stage statutory framework For group and school-based providers Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68c024cb8c6d992f23edd79c/Early_years_foundation_stage_statutory_framework_-_for_group_and_school-based_providers.pdf.pdf?. (Accessed: 25 October 2025).

Dore, R., Purtell, K., Chen, J., Justice, L. (2022) 'The Interplay among Parents' Stress, Nonparental Childcare, and Child Language Development among Low-Income Toddlers', *Early Education and Development*, 34(6), pp. 1–11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2022.2106767>.

Dickinson, D. and Morse, A. (2019) *Connecting through talk : nurturing children's development with language*. 1st ed. Baltimore ; Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Fell, A. (2017) 'Why storytelling is so powerful in the digital era | Ashley Fell | TEDxUniMelb', *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSi0kmqOBu4>. (Accessed: 25 October 2025)

Gilkerson, J., Richards, J.A. and Topping, K.J. (2016) 'The impact of book reading in the early years on parent–child language interaction', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 17(1), pp. 92–110. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798415608907>.

Law, J., Charlton, J., Dockrell, J., Gascoigne, M., McKean, C. and Theakston, A. (2017) *Early Language Development: Needs, provision, and intervention for preschool children from socio- economically disadvantaged backgrounds A Report for the Education Endowment Foundation*. Available at: <https://www.yhphnetwork.co.uk/media/1494/early-language-development-needs-provision-and-intervention-for-preschool-children-from-socio-economically-disadvantaged-backgrounds-phe-2017.pdf>. (Accessed: 25 October 2025)

Lucarevski, C.R. (2016) 'The role of storytelling on language learning: A literature review', *Working Papers of the Linguistics Circle*, 26(1), pp. 24–44. Available at: <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/WPLC/article/view/15309>. (Accessed: 25 October 2025)

Lysaker, J.T. (2019) *Before words : wordless picture books and the development of reading in young children*. New York, New York ; Teachers College Press.

Maureen, I., Van der Meij, H. and De Jong, T. (2021) 'Evaluating storytelling activities for early literacy development', *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 30(4), pp. 679–696. doi: 10.1080/09669760.2021.1933917.

Maslow, A. H. (1943) *A Theory of Human Motivation*. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), pp. 370-396.

Madigan, S., McArthur, B. A., Anhorn, A., Eirich, R. and Christakis, D. A. (2020) 'Associations Between Screen Use and Child Language Skills', *JAMA Pediatrics*, 174(7). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.0327>

Mujahidah, N., Damayanti, E. and Afiif, A. (2021) 'The Role of Storytelling Methods Using Hand Puppets in Early Children's Language Development', *Child Education Journal*, 3(2), pp. 78–91. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.33086/cej.v3i2.2129>.

NHS (2020) *Help your baby learn to talk*, nhs.uk. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/baby/babys-development/play-and-learning/help-your-baby-learn-to-talk/>. (Accessed: 24 October 2025)

Neaum, S. (2012) *Language and literacy for the early years*. Learning Matters.

Nursery World (2019) All About Storytelling. https://elearning.pacey.org.uk/storyline/EYSmart/Resources/017_nw_eyfs_allabout-storytelling.pdf (Accessed 25 October 2025)

Open University (1973) *Language and Learning. Block 6-7. Generative Linguistics Language Acquisition: Language and Cognition*.

Piaget, J. (1951) *Play, dreams and imitation in childhood*. Routledge. Available at: <https://www.rexresearch1.com/PiagetChildPsychologyLibrary/PlayDreamsImitationChildhood.pdf>? (Accessed: 26 October 2025)

Palphreyman, D. (2019) *Working with Puppets, Elsa Support*. Available at: <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/working-with-puppets/>. (Accessed: 26 October 2025)

Public Health Scotland (2023) Attachment and bonding during pregnancy, NHS inform. Available at: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/ready-steady-baby/pregnancy/relationships-and-wellbeing-in-pregnancy/attachment-and-bonding-during-pregnancy/>. (Accessed: 21 October 2025)

Reedy, K. and Parker, J. (eds) (2018) *Digital literacy unpacked*. London: Facet.

Radesky, J., Weeks, H., Ball, R., Schaller, A., Yeo, S., Durnez, J., Tamayo-Rios, M., Epstein, M., Kirkorian, H., Coyne, S. and Barr, R. (2020) 'Young Children's Use of Smartphones and Tablets', *Pediatrics*, 146(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-3518>.

Rowland, C. (2014) *Understanding child language acquisition*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203776025>.

Skinner, B.F. (1957). *Verbal Behaviour*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Available at: https://www.bfskinner.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/2014_05_P_003.pdf (Accessed: 26 October 2025)

Shaw, A. (2021) 'Read, speak, sing: Promoting early literacy in the health care setting', *Paediatrics & Child Health*, 26(3), pp. 182–188. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/pxab005>

Shakibaie, S. (2021) *Child's Average Attention Span By Age: From Toddler To Teens, Ready Kids*. Available at: <https://readykids.com.au/average-attention-span-by-age/>. (Accessed: 26 October 2025)

Schoneberger, T. (2025) 'Defining Verbal Behavior: Two Conflicting Approaches', *The Analysis of Verbal Behavior* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40616-025-00217-x>.

The Hanen Centre (2024) *Bringing Books to Life! Build Early Literacy Skills by Acting Out Stories*. Hanen.org. Available at: <https://www.hanen.org/information-tips/bringing-books-to-life>. (Accessed: 26 October 2025)

The University of Sheffield (2022) *What is Language Acquisition?*. Available at: <https://sheffield.ac.uk/linguistics/home/all-about-linguistics/about-website/branches-linguistics/language-acquisition/what-language-acquisition>. (Accessed: 21 October 2025)

UNICEF (2018) *Why it's important to read to your baby*, YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkmyWd4TtZg> (Accessed: 21 October 2025).

UNICEF (2023) Child Protection in Digital Education. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/134131/file/Child%20Protection%20in%20Digital%20Education%20Technical%20Note.pdf>. (Accessed: 21 October 2025)

Wandsworth Early Years (2025) Electronic devices in Early Years. Available at: <https://earlyyears.wandsworth.gov.uk/Article/171196>. (Accessed: 24 October 2025)

Whitehead, M.R. (2010) *Language and literacy in the early years 0-7*. 4th ed. London, [England: SAGE.

Welsh Government (2017) *Flying Start -Annex Guidance on Speech, Language and Communication*. Available at:

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-07/flying-start-speech-language-and-communication-guidance.pdf>. (Accessed: 22 October 2025)