

Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

Module: ECEY5004

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I acknowledge the use of Microsoft CoPilot on 19 October 2026 to find relevant sources for my research.

I used the prompt:

1. Can you find journal articles published between 2016 and 2026 on Makaton and its impact on children's communication, language and literacy development.

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.

Part 1

Traditional story video:

[Traditional story.mov](#)

Digital story video:

[Digital Story.MOV](#)

Digital Story Powerpoint:

[The Adventures of Dilwyn the Dragon.pptx](#)

Part 2

According to Sensale Yazdian and Diamant-Cohen (2021), storytelling plays an important role in supporting young children's learning and development. Stories help children develop their language, communication and listening skills by introducing new vocabulary, supporting their understanding of story structures, and providing opportunities to discuss, predict and retell events. As technology plays a greater role in children's daily lives, storytelling can also be experienced through digital stories and different technologies, supporting the development of children's digital literacy skills (Erstad, 2020). This paper explores the storytelling skills used by the practitioner during both a traditional storytelling session and a digital storytelling session, examining how these skills supported children's language, literacy and digital literacy development.

Questioning was one of the key storytelling skills used throughout both stories. Questioning is a tool used in early years education to support children's learning and development. Using open-ended and closed questions, practitioners can encourage children to think, explore ideas and engage with learning experiences. Questioning also enables practitioners to gather information about children's understanding and helps children develop curiosity about the world around them (EDGE, 2021).

Murray (2022) suggests that questions play an important role in supporting children's deeper learning and understanding. Questioning within storytelling is seen as important as it encourages children to become involved in the story and think about what is happening. The storyteller used questions such as "What animals live on the farm?" and "What weather can we see?". These encouraged children to draw upon their own knowledge and experiences, helping them make links between the story and the world around them. Bromley (2019) suggests questioning throughout storytelling can also spark curiosity and encourage children to explore new ideas through discussion. As well as providing opportunities for children to share their thoughts and opinions, which reflects Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), recognising children's right to have their views heard and respected (UNICEF UK, 2019).

Walsh and Hodge (2018) found that questioning throughout stories supports children's language and literacy development by encouraging verbal responses,

helping children develop vocabulary and understanding of the story. Questions provide opportunities for children to discuss stories, explain their thinking and engage with language in a meaningful way. During *Room on the Broom*, the storyteller used questions such as “How many friends are now on the broom?” and “What do you think roars so loud and scary?”, encouraging children to think about what was happening within the story, share their ideas and make predictions. In contrast, during *The Adventures of Dilwyn the Dragon*, the storyteller asked “Can anyone remember where Dilwyn the Dragon visited?”, encouraging children to recall information and demonstrate their understanding of what had happened in the story. Although the styles of questioning differed, both approaches encouraged children to ask and answer questions, supporting engagement and understanding of the story. This is supported by Causey and Spenser (2024) research, their research found that through answering and discussing questions, children are given opportunities to build confidence when expressing their thoughts and ideas, develop their communication skills and become more independent learners.

Vygotsky’s theory supports the use of questioning within storytelling as he believed children learn through interactions with a more knowledgeable other. Through questioning, adults can provide scaffolding by building on children’s existing knowledge and supporting them to develop a new understanding (Vygotsky and Cole, 1978). However, Cohrssen, Niklas and Tayler (2016) suggest that questioning should be used carefully throughout storytelling. Asking too many questions can interrupt the flow of the story, making it difficult for children to become engaged, understand and follow the story, potentially affecting opportunities to develop language and literacy skills. Similarly, Chen and Huang (2025) found that slowing down and adapting questions to suit children's needs and levels of understanding supported the development of children's language, knowledge and understanding further than just asking generic question that children may not fully understanding or could relate to. Together, these findings highlight that questioning is most effective when questions are adapted to children's needs and used at appropriate points throughout the story.

Another skill used by the storyteller was Makaton. Makaton is a tool that uses symbols, signs and speech together to support communication. It is used to help young children and individuals understand and express language, especially those

with speech, language and communication difficulties (Vaughan, 2025). Makaton makes communication more accessible by providing visual support alongside spoken language. Within storytelling it helps children engage with the story, understand key vocabulary and participate more actively in story experiences. It also promotes inclusion by enabling children with differing communication abilities to access the same story experiences as others around them (Vaughan, 2025).

Research by Novack, Chan and Waxman (2022) suggests that sign language and visual communication support language development by strengthening both receptive and expressive language skills, helping children to understand the communication of others while expressing their own thoughts, experiences and emotions. By combining speech, signs and symbols, Makaton provides children with more than one way to understand and use language. Gale and Martin (2024) highlight that this multisensory approach helps make language more accessible and vocabulary more memorable. This may be beneficial for children with communication difficulties, as it provides them with additional ways to communicate and express themselves. This reflects Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC, which recognise children's rights to express their views and communicate in ways that meet their individual needs (UNICEF UK, 2019).

Throughout the digital story session of *The Adventures of Dilwyn the Dragon*, the storyteller used signs for colours, emotions, animals and the days of the week, helping to support children's understanding of these concepts alongside spoken vocabulary. Using a digital story alongside Makaton signs also supported aspects of children's digital literacy. As technology is becoming more significant in children's everyday lives, digital storytelling can help children develop confidence, familiarity and skills in using technology to support learning and communication (Erstad, 2020). This reflects the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022), which highlights the importance of developing learners who can confidently engage with digital technologies. In contrast, the traditional storytelling session of *Room on the Broom* relied on spoken language and story props to support children's understanding of the story. Whilst both storytelling approaches supported language and literacy development, the use of Makaton, visuals and spoken language within the digital story provided children with additional ways to access and understand the story (Erstad, 2020). Bruner's theory further supports the use of Makaton, suggesting that

children learn through actions, visual images and language, suggesting that learning is strengthened when information is presented in a variety of ways (Aubrey and Riley, 2026).

Research by Maureen, van der Meij, and de Jong (2022) also suggests that Makaton supports literacy development. By combining speech with signs, it supports story comprehension by helping children understand key vocabulary and make connections between words, meanings and events within a story. The repeated signing of the days of the week throughout the story also supports sequencing skills, helping children understand the order of events as Dilwyn the Dragon visited different locations around Wales each day. Sequencing and repetition of signs and vocabulary support memory, recall and the retelling of key moments within a story, with Ralli *et al.* (2021) identifying story retelling and vocabulary as important aspects of children's literacy development. The use of Makaton also reflects the aims of the Curriculum for Wales, which recognises the importance of supporting learners to understand, interpret and communicate through a range of communication approaches (Welsh Government, 2019).

However, Knowland and Waters (2026) found that some practitioners expressed concerns about children becoming over-reliant on signs and visual support to understand and communicate which may limit opportunities for children to communicate through speech and reduce their confidence to do so. These findings highlight that whilst Makaton can support language and literacy development, it may not always be the appropriate approach for every child and should be used alongside a range of storytelling strategies.

A final skill the storyteller demonstrated throughout both stories was the use of props and resources. Props and resources are materials used to support storytelling, such as books, toys, puppets, pictures and digital technologies (Bates, n.d.). Within the storytelling activities, character props were used alongside Room on the Broom, whilst a plush dragon and PowerPoint digital story were used during The Adventures of Dilwyn the Dragon. Research suggests that props and resources can enhance storytelling experiences by providing children with visual and physical representations of key characters, events and ideas (Bates, n.d.).

Research by Holmes *et al*, (2022) highlights that props and resources can support children's language and literacy development by helping them understand and use new vocabulary. During storytelling, children are often introduced to unfamiliar words linked to characters, settings and events. Having a visual or physical representation alongside these words can help children understand their meaning, as children are able to connect the language they hear to something concrete (Holmes *et al.*, 2022). Developing vocabulary is an important aspect of language development as it enables children to express their thoughts, ideas and experiences more effectively. A wider vocabulary also supports children's ability to participate in conversations, ask questions, communicate their understanding with others and develop the language needed for early writing (Wyse, Bradford and Winstanley, 2024).

Rahiem (2021) also suggests that understanding vocabulary is closely linked to literacy development as children need to understand the meaning of words before they can fully engage with stories and texts. Rahiem (2021) highlights that when used effectively, props can strengthen these connections and make language more meaningful and memorable. During *Room on the Broom*, the character props provided a visual representation of the characters being described within the story, helping to reinforce the language used by the storyteller. Similarly, within *The Adventures of Dilwyn the Dragon*, the dragon toy acted as a visual representation of the main character throughout the story. Piaget's theory supports this, as he believed children learn best through concrete experiences. The use of props provides children with something they can see and relate to, helping them connect language with real and meaningful experiences (Piaget, Gattegno and Hodgson, 1962). This reflects the Curriculum for Wales, which highlights the importance of supporting learners to communicate effectively and develop literacy through meaningful experiences and a range of resources (Welsh Government, 2019).

However, Yonzon *et al*, (2023) suggest that whilst props and resources are often viewed as valuable tools within storytelling, their effectiveness depends largely on how they are used by the practitioner. Simply providing props does not guarantee children's language and literacy development. If resources are not clearly linked to the story, children may focus on the objects themselves rather than the language being introduced, reducing opportunities to engage with new vocabulary and the meaning of the story. Highlighting that the success of props may depend less on the

resources themselves and more on the practitioner's ability to use them purposefully to support learning (Yonzon *et al.*, 2023).

Bromley (2019) also suggests the use of props might not always be necessary to support children's language and literacy development. Even though, Holmes *et al.*, (2022) says props can enhance storytelling experiences, research by Bromley (2019) highlights the importance of discussion, interaction and shared storytelling experiences in supporting children's learning, indicating that props alone are not enough to support children's language and literacy development, and that meaningful interactions between the practitioner and children remain an important part of storytelling.

In conclusion, storytelling is recognised within research as an effective approach for supporting children's language, literacy and digital literacy development. Research highlights that questioning can promote communication, engagement and understanding (Murray, 2022), whilst Makaton can support accessibility, language comprehension and participation through a multisensory approach (Novack, Chan and Waxman, 2022). Similarly, props and resources can support vocabulary development by helping children connect language to meaningful and concrete experiences (Holmes *et al.*, 2022). However, research also highlights that these strategies are not effective in isolation, with their success depending on how they are used by practitioners and adapted to meet children's individual needs (Yonzon *et al.*, 2023). AI was used to identify sources relating to Makaton and its role in supporting children's language and literacy development.

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