

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

I acknowledge the use of Microsoft Copilot (2025). Available at: <https://copilot.microsoft.com/> on 19th October 2025 to find a reference to support my writing in the props section.

I used the prompt(s):

1. Find an article about Sensory issues in Autism children that affect storytelling

I have also used generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in this work, Grammarly (2025) to assist grammatically, and Google Translate (2025) to support this work as an English as a Second Language.

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.

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Characterisation in Storytelling</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Scaffolding in Storytelling.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Use of Props in Storytelling.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Reference list:</i>	<i>11</i>

Introduction

According to Dickinson and Morse (2019), language development begins before birth, as foetuses are exposed to rhythmic speech patterns that activate early neural mechanisms involved in auditory and linguistic processing. Supporting this, Cara *et al.* (2025) found that prenatal functional connectivity within the auditory and language network predicts later language skills, reinforcing the view that the foundations for speech perception and processing are established in utero. From birth onwards, exposure to storytelling provides children with rich and varied linguistic input, introducing them to new vocabulary, complex syntax, and narrative structures that strengthen both oral communication and comprehension (Dubiel, 2024). The Department for Education (2023) similarly identifies storytelling as a key pedagogical practice through which children internalise language patterns and expand their vocabulary, supporting the development of early literacy. Through interactive dialogue and repetition, children internalise narrative structures and develop phonological awareness, which forms a crucial foundation for early reading (Spencer and Pierce, 2023). Moreover, digital storytelling extends these benefits by integrating sound, imagery, and movement, which enhances engagement and fosters multimodal literacy in contemporary learning environments (Stefan, 2022). Overall, storytelling in both traditional and digital formats provides a vital context for developing young children's language, communication, and foundational literacy abilities.

Building on these principles, the following discussion examines how practitioner behaviours, such as characterisation, scaffolding, and the use of props, supported language development during the traditional story 'Peace at Last' and the digital story 'Giraffes Can't Dance', highlighting their role in promoting interaction, engagement, and comprehension in the early years.

Characterisation in Storytelling

Characterisation, demonstrated through expressive voice, facial expressions, and gestures, is widely recognised as an effective pedagogical strategy that supports language development by animating narratives in ways that encourage interaction and emotional engagement (Cremin *et al.*, 2017). During the traditional storytelling of *Peace at Last*, the practitioner deliberately varied tone and pitch to reflect Mr Bear's tiredness and frustration, providing prosodic and contextual cues that helped children infer emotional meaning. This approach reflects Crystal's (2003) assertion that vocal modulation and intonation play a critical role in sustaining attention and enhancing language comprehension, particularly when stories are delivered in emotionally expressive ways. However, as Maureen, van der Meij and de Jong (2021) note, when vocal tone, gesture, and facial expression are not cohesively integrated, children may experience difficulties in interpreting meaning, which can hinder both language comprehension and expressive communication. This reinforces the importance of practitioner knowledge in maintaining coherent multimodal expression and engagement, an aspect of practice that can be particularly challenging within the dynamic context of early years education. According to Lor *et al.* (2019), when practitioners convey emotions through characterisation, children begin to develop the language of feelings. Such emotional modelling fosters the emergence of social language skills, including empathy, self-expression, and dialogue, by linking words to emotional experiences. By embodying characters and exaggerating emotion, the practitioner reinforced word meaning associations in ways that align with the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2019a), which emphasises creativity, communication, and emotional understanding as foundations of early language and literacy development. Furthermore, as Spencer and Pierce (2023) explain, the use of characterisation in storytelling enables practitioners to model expressive language and emotional nuance, supporting children in internalising narrative structure, descriptive vocabulary, and character development. These elements are later reflected in their writing through improved sentence construction, greater coherence, and enhanced imaginative expression.

Conversely, in the digital storytelling of *Giraffes Can't Dance*, animated visuals contributed to characterisation while the practitioner maintained an active

pedagogical role through expressive voice modulation and purposeful gestures. However, without deliberate scaffolding and opportunities for dialogue, such experiences may risk positioning children as passive recipients rather than active meaning-makers (Grenier, 2019), highlighting the importance of intentional practitioner intervention to sustain interaction and learning. Although the children did not directly interact with the digital medium, the activity nonetheless introduced foundational elements of digital literacy. As O'Byrne *et al.* (2018) explain, digital storytelling integrates diverse media forms, such as images, video, text, and sound, to convey meaning in a multimodal format. Wessel-Powell, Kargin and Wohlwend (2016) similarly argue that this approach enables children to construct meaning through the interplay of visual, gestural, and verbal modes. Furthermore, Maureen, van der Meij and de Jong (2021) highlight that animated stories narrated live by a practitioner can enhance children's understanding of narrative features such as sequencing, symbolism, and perspective. These strategies align with the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2019a), which promotes communication across varied expressive modes and fosters creativity, emotional literacy, and well-being. When characterisation is applied purposefully, it supports not only language acquisition but also holistic development across emotional and cognitive domains.

Scaffolding in Storytelling

Smith, Cowie and Blades (2015) suggest that scaffolding is not a static or didactic method but a dynamic process through which practitioners provide adaptive support, enabling children to explore, reflect, and extend their understanding. The Department for Education (2021) states that scaffolding within storytelling offers an intentional framework through which practitioners enhance children's communication skills by fostering engagement and narrative understanding. When attuned to children's developmental needs, this approach creates rich opportunities for linguistic growth and co-construction of meaning (Lucarevschi, 2016). Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the More Knowledgeable Other underpins this process, positioning the practitioner as a linguistic guide who enables children to progress beyond what they could achieve independently. Through interactive dialogue, repetition, and expressive modelling, children internalise new vocabulary, grammatical structures,

and narrative forms, demonstrating how social interaction supports both language development and cognitive advancement (Spencer and Pierce, 2023).

In both observed storytelling activities, *Peace at Last* and *Giraffes Can't Dance*, the practitioner employed voice modulation, expressive gestures, and facial cues to guide interpretation and sustain attention, enabling children to connect with emotional content and follow the narrative structure, particularly where open-ended questioning was minimal. For instance, the repeated phrase "Oh no! I can't stand this!" in *Peace at Last* and the rhythmic line "Gerald was a tall giraffe whose neck was long and slim" in *Giraffes Can't Dance* encouraged children to focus on the phonological features of language. These scaffolded interactions supported the development of phonological awareness by drawing attention to tone, rhythm, and sentence melody, essential components in early literacy acquisition (Maureen, van der Meij and de Jong, 2021).

As Spencer and Pierce (2023) explain, such auditory sensitivity enables children to segment words into syllables, recognise sound–symbol correspondences, and develop expressive fluency in both spoken and early written communication. Similarly, Melzi, Schick, and Wuest (2022) emphasise that patterned, prosodic storytelling enhances children's ability to identify linguistic structures that underpin reading development. Bromley (2019) also highlights how expressive, interactive shared reading sessions contribute to oral language enrichment, supporting vocabulary expansion, comprehension, and foundational literacy skills. Tomasello (2003, cited in Yıldız, 2025) adds that children often reproduce adult grammatical constructions, reinforcing the importance of modelling as a scaffold for linguistic development. Cekaite and Björk-Willén (2018) further underscore the value of non-verbal scaffolding in maintaining attention and stimulating curiosity, creating a linguistically rich environment for language learning.

Furthermore, in the digital storytelling of *Giraffes Can't Dance*, the practitioner employed animation as a visual scaffold alongside live narration to extend children's developing digital literacy skills. Rahiem (2021) notes that when narration is deliberately connected to on-screen visuals, children begin to understand digital texts as purposeful forms of communication rather than passive entertainment. By

narrating without the original audio, the practitioner encouraged children to interpret meaning through movement, colour, and character expression, integrating these visual cues with spoken language. This pedagogical choice promoted digital competencies such as interpreting multimodal information, recognising relationships between image and narrative, and developing sequential understanding within digital contexts (Stefan, 2022). Collectively, these oral and digital scaffolding strategies reveal how practitioners can bridge traditional and digital modes of communication, enabling children to transfer linguistic understanding into new multimodal contexts and develop awareness of how meaning is co-constructed through language and technology, an approach increasingly recognised in early childhood digital literacy research (Erstad, 2020). This underlines the continuing need for practitioner scaffolding to ensure digital storytelling remains interactive, dialogic, and linguistically purposeful. By guiding children to interpret visual and verbal information together, practitioners nurture both linguistic understanding and foundational digital literacy, empowering learners to construct meaning across diverse multimodal contexts, thereby embodying the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2019a) vision of capable communicators and confident digital learners.

Use of Props in Storytelling

The use of props within storytelling provides a tangible and interactive scaffold that supports children's comprehension, engagement, and expressive language development, as connecting spoken language with physical objects transforms abstract ideas into concrete experiences, enabling children to internalise new vocabulary, concepts, and actions within meaningful contexts (Porta, 2021). As demonstrated in the storytelling activity *Peace at Last*, the practitioner used props such as the toy bear, house, and images of the clock, owl, and fridge, allowing children to actively connect language to real-world referents and reinforcing their understanding of story sequence and related vocabulary. These visual and tactile cues encouraged children to verbalise observations, imitate familiar phrases, and describe events, fostering both expressive and receptive language skills (Cekaite and Björk-Willén, 2018). This reflects Piaget's (1951, cited in Yıldız, 2025) view that children in the preoperational stage learn most effectively through sensory and physical engagement, as concrete experiences provide the foundation for later

abstract reasoning and symbolic thought. Similarly, Bruner's concept of enactive representation (Ruiz and Linaza, 2015) reinforces this by suggesting that learning initially occurs through physical action, which gradually develops into symbolic and linguistic understanding. Through the guided use of props, the practitioner effectively bridged action and language, enabling children to interpret narrative meaning and communicate their understanding with growing confidence and clarity, thereby supporting the development of purposeful spoken interaction as a foundation for later literacy (Bromley, 2019).

Additionally, the intentional use of props during storytelling plays a crucial role in supporting children's early reading and writing development. According to Luen (2021), when children manipulate props to retell or extend story events, they develop greater awareness of narrative sequencing, structure, and vocabulary, as the process of handling and describing these objects enables them to organise ideas, articulate relationships between actions, and use increasingly descriptive language, thereby strengthening the cognitive and linguistic foundations of early writing. Likewise, Melzi, Schick and Wuest (2022) contend that early narrative experiences incorporating tangible objects foster emergent literacy by enabling children to recognise recurring linguistic patterns, auditory cues, and story structures that underpin decoding and comprehension. Through repeated engagement with story-related props, children learn to anticipate narrative sequences, connect spoken language to visual representations, and internalise vocabulary. These foundational abilities support later reading development by equipping children with the cognitive and linguistic strategies required to infer meaning, predict textual outcomes, and engage critically with written narratives (Spencer and Pierce, 2023).

While the use of props can significantly enrich storytelling by enhancing engagement and comprehension (Porta, 2021), children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), such as those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), may experience difficulty processing multiple sensory stimuli. According to the National Autistic Society (2024), heightened sensitivity to sound, colour, or movement can result in sensory overload when multiple stimuli are presented simultaneously, making it challenging for children to filter competing information, maintain attention, and engage effectively with the narrative. Ferretti *et al.* (2018) similarly found that divided attention affects

children's ability to sustain narrative coherence, resulting in reduced comprehension and limited vocabulary retention, both essential aspects of early language development. In the digital storytelling of *Giraffes Can't Dance*, the practitioner made the deliberate choice not to use physical props, recognising that the animated visuals and on-screen movement already provided sufficient sensory engagement to capture children's attention. Introducing additional physical props in such contexts could risk overstimulating children or dividing their focus between competing stimuli (Yonzon *et al.*, 2023). Instead, the practitioner relied on vocal expression, gesture, and facial animation to enhance understanding and sustain engagement, ensuring that attention remained centred on the narrative and language within the digital story (Rahiem, 2021). Therefore, practitioners should regulate sensory input and choose props that complement the story's linguistic and narrative purpose, aligning their approach with Welsh Government (2019b) guidance, which promotes inclusive and adaptive practice to meet diverse sensory and communication needs. By reflecting on and adjusting their methods, practitioners can ensure that all children, including those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), participate meaningfully in storytelling experiences that foster communication, deepen comprehension, and strengthen the linguistic and cognitive foundations of early literacy.

Conclusion

The discussion was informed by a range of academic research, theoretical perspectives, and policy-based sources, which collectively deepened understanding of how both traditional and digital storytelling foster language development in the early years. The study by Spencer and Pierce (2023) was particularly valuable in shaping the analysis of traditional storytelling, as it provided empirical evidence that oral storytelling enhances children's communication, comprehension, and literacy through expressive interaction and active engagement. Their studies supported the interpretation of *Peace at Last*, illustrating how practitioner-led expression encourages vocabulary growth, narrative understanding, and linguistic confidence. Conversely, Rahiem (2021) provided a strong theoretical framework for analysing digital storytelling, showing how visual movement and imagery sustain attention and promote multimodal literacy. This perspective clarified how visual and linguistic modes interact to strengthen comprehension and language development in digital contexts.

Additionally, Microsoft Copilot (2025), an Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool, was used to identify the National Autistic Society (2024) resource, as limited peer-reviewed research addressed how sensory overstimulation from sound, colour, or movement affects engagement and language processing during storytelling, particularly for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This source proved valuable in enhancing understanding of sensory sensitivity and inclusive practice, offering relevant strategies to support focus and communication. While AI assisted in locating this resource, academic judgement was applied to evaluate its reliability, accuracy, and relevance, ensuring that the material was credible, appropriate, and meaningfully informed the discussion.

Together, these sources enriched the discussion by combining theoretical depth, empirical insight, and ethical reflection. They demonstrate how storytelling, whether traditional or digital, can be used purposefully to nurture communication, comprehension, and inclusive language development in early years education, reinforcing the value of reflective and evidence-informed practice in contemporary pedagogy.

Reference list:

Bromley, T. (2019) 'Enhancing children's oral language and literacy development through storytelling in an early years classroom', *Practical literacy*, 24(1), pp. 6–8. Available at: <https://foundationforlearningandliteracy.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PL-February-2019-Sample-Article.pdf> (Accessed: 10 October 2025).

Cara, C., Canini, M., Oprandi, C., Pecco, N., Cavoretto, P.I., Candiani, M., Falini, A., Baldoli, C., Tettamanti, M. and Rosa, P.A.D. (2025) Prenatal brain connectivity and postnatal language: how familial risk and prenatal speech exposure shape early language skills. *Scientific reports*, 15(1), p.33281. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-17531-y>

Cekaite, A. and Björk-Willén, P. (2018) 'Enchantment in storytelling: Co-operation and participation in children's aesthetic experience', *Linguistics and education*, 48, pp. 52–60. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2018.08.005>.

Cremin, T., Flewitt, R., Swann, J., Faulkner, D. and Kucirkova, N. (2017) 'Storytelling and story-acting: Co-construction in action', *Journal of early childhood research : ECR*, 16(1), pp. 3–17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X17750205>

Crystal, D. (2003) *English as a global language Second edition*. Available at: https://culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/pdf/research/books/nation_branding/English_As_A_Global_Language_-_David_Crystal.pdf (Accessed: 13 October 2025).

Department for Education (2021) *EYFS Communication and language – Exploring language*. YouTube video. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvMeKnJWQz4> (Accessed: 13 October 2025).

Department for 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: 13 October 2025).

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

Dubiel, J. (2024) *The crucial role of storytelling in early childhood education*. BookTrust. Available at: <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/resources/find-resources/the-crucial-role-of-storytelling-in-early-childhood-education/> (Accessed: 16 October 2025).

Erstad, O. (ed.) (2020) *The Routledge handbook of digital literacies in early childhood*. London: Routledge.

Ferretti, F., Adornetti, I., Chiera, A., Nicchiarelli, S., Valeri, G., Magni, R., Vicari, S. and Marini, A. (2018). Time and Narrative: An Investigation of Storytelling Abilities in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00944>

Google Translate (2025) *Google Translate*. Available at: <https://translate.google.com/> (Accessed: 24 October 2025).

Grammarly (2025) *Grammarly*. Available at: <https://www.grammarly.com> (Accessed: 24 October 2025).

Grenier, J. (2019) *Building learning in the early years: how conversations can change children's lives for the better*. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-years/building-learning-in-the-early-years-how-conversations-can-change-childrens-lives-for-the-better> (Accessed: 18 October 2025).

Lor, M., Vang, X., Rabago, D., Brown, R.L. and Backonja, M. (2019) 'It Hurts as If...': Pain-Associated Language, Visual Characterization, and Storytelling in Hmong Adults. *Pain Medicine*, 21(8), pp.1690–1702. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/pm/pnz268>

Lucarevski, C.R. (2016) 'The role of storytelling on language learning: A literature review', *WPLC. Working papers of the Linguistics Circle of the University of Victoria*, 26(1), pp. 24–44. Available at: <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/WPLC/article/view/15309> (Accessed: 12 October 2025).

Luen, L. C. (2021) 'Puppetry activities in early childhood programmes', *Southeast Asia Early Childhood Journal*, 10, pp. 89-96. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.37134/saecj.vol10.sp.8.2021>

Maureen, I.Y., 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. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2021.1933917>

Melzi, G., Schick, A.R. and Wuest, C. (2022) Stories beyond Books: Teacher Storytelling Supports Children's Literacy Skills. *Early Education and Development*, 34(2), pp.1–21. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2021.2024749>

Microsoft Copilot (2025). Available at: <https://copilot.microsoft.com/> (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

National Autistic Society (2024) *Autism and sensory processing*. Available at: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/about-autism/sensory-processing> (Accessed on: 19 October 2025).

O'Byrne, W.I., Houser, K., Stone, R. and White, M. (2018) Digital Storytelling in Early Childhood: Student Illustrations Shaping Social Interactions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01800>

Porta, S.D. (2021) Tina Bruce, Lynn McNair and Jane Whinnett (eds), Putting storytelling at the heart of early childhood practice: A reflective guide for early years practitioners. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, p.146879842110466. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687984211046645>

Rahiem, M.D.H. (2021) 'Storytelling in early childhood education: Time to go digital', *International journal of child Care and education policy (Seoul)*, 15(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-021-00081-x>

Ruiz, L.M. and Linaza, J.L. (2015) 'Motor skills, motor competence and children: Bruner's ideas in the era of embodiment cognition and action', in Gajardo, M. and Ramírez, M. (eds.) *Jerome S. Bruner beyond 100: Cultivating possibilities*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 113–122. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-25536-1_10

Smith, P.K., Cowie, H. and Blades, M. (2015) *Understanding children's development*. Sixth edition. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley.

Spencer, T.D. and Pierce, C. (2023) 'Classroom-based Oral Storytelling: Reading, Writing, and Social Benefits', *The Reading teacher*, 76(5), pp. 525–534. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2144>

Stefan Meier (2022) 'Digital Storytelling: A Didactic Approach to Multimodal Coherence', *Frontiers in communication*, 7. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2022.906268>

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Edited by M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner and E. Souberman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Welsh Government (2019a). *Languages, Literacy and Communication: Designing your curriculum - Hwb*. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/languages-literacy-and-communication/designing-your-curriculum/> (Accessed: 15 October 2025).

Welsh Government (2019b). *Support for children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in educational settings*. Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/support-children-and-young-people-autistic-spectrum-disorder-asd-educational-settings-html> (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

Wessel-Powell, C., Kargin, T. and Wohlwend, K.E. (2016) 'Enriching and Assessing Young Children's Multimodal Storytelling', *The Reading teacher*, 70(2), pp. 167–178. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1491>

Yıldız, T. (2025) FROM CONSTRUCTIVISM TO CULTURAL COGNITION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PIAGET, VYGOTSKY, AND TOMASELLO'S THEORIES OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT. *HUMANITAS - Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 13(25), pp.411–429. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.20304/humanitas.1601228>

Yonzon, K.C., Fleeer, M., Fragkiadaki, G. and Rai, P. (2022) The Role of Props in Promoting Imagination during Toddlerhood. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 55. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-022-00336-9>

Reference for the traditional storytelling activity:

Murphy, J. (1981) *Peace at last*. London: Macmillan Children's Books.

Reference for the digital storytelling activity:

Gwen Koh (2021) *Giraffe can't dance | story of believing yourself | Kids books read aloud | animated story*. YouTube video. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-SQrp4pCjU> (Accessed 08 October 2025).