

Reflective Commentary – Based on theoretical evidence, evaluate and reflect on your personal contribution to developing the literacy skills of children, young people within your video presentation.

Introduction.

This essay explores literacy from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Part 1 examines key theorists in language and cognitive development, comparing their ideas and their influence on teaching practices within an educational setting. It also considers current policies, including changes over the last 30 years, and the role of setting-specific literacy policies.

Part 1 further explores how literacy is shaped by social and environmental factors. It considers how learners develop differently and highlights inclusive approaches to support this. The impact of poverty and deprivation on oracy skills is discussed, alongside other factors such as home environment, additional learning needs, emotional wellbeing, and English as an Additional Language.

Part 2 focuses on practical application. It reflects on personal practice, particularly the use of storytelling to support literacy development. This reflection is based on a recorded storytelling session delivered to learners aged 12–15 and is structured using Gibbs' reflective cycle.

Part one.

Literacy involves more than reading and writing; it also includes speaking and listening, which are essential for effective communication and participation in society (National Literacy Trust, no date). Strong literacy skills enable individuals to access information, interact with others, and complete everyday tasks. However, the development of these skills can be hindered by barriers linked to poverty, deprivation, and Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Children living in poverty may have limited access to books, digital resources, and language-rich environments, as well as fewer opportunities for parental support due to financial or time constraints. Deprivation can also be associated with lower educational attainment, reduced aspirations, and irregular school attendance. For learners with ALN, barriers may include difficulties with communication, processing information, or understanding language, requiring differentiated teaching and targeted support.

In Wales, educational reforms informed by Graham Donaldson emphasise the importance of literacy for future generations. The Curriculum for Wales identifies literacy as a cross-curricular responsibility, aiming to develop ambitious, capable learners who can apply these skills in real-life contexts (Welsh Government, 2022). The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 highlights the need for inclusive practice and tailored support to overcome learning barriers (Welsh Government, 2018). These policies recognise that addressing inequality and supporting diverse learning needs is essential to

improving literacy outcomes and ensuring all learners can succeed. This is reflected in practice at Henry Tudor School, where literacy is embedded across subjects through reading, writing, and oracy activities, and supported by whole-school policies such as Additional Learning Needs provision, attendance strategies, and equality plans (Henry Tudor School, 2025). This includes guided reading, phonics or catch-up interventions, and the use of writing frames and modelling to support written work. Opportunities for speaking and listening, such as group discussions and presentations, are also key. In line with the Curriculum for Wales, literacy is embedded across all subjects. Additional support, such as one-to-one interventions, differentiated tasks, and assistive technology, is provided in line with the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 to ensure all learners can access literacy.

The impact of low literacy is significant at both individual and social levels. It is estimated to cost the UK economy £81 billion annually due to lost earnings and increased welfare spending (National Literacy Trust, 2018). Individuals with low literacy are more likely to experience unemployment, low-paid work, and poorer mental health outcomes, highlighting how literacy is closely linked to wider life chances. From a social constructivist perspective, this can be understood through Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), first introduced in *Thought and Language* (1934), which emphasises that learning is shaped by social interaction and environment. These interactions include communication with teachers, peer collaboration, and language-rich experiences at home such as conversations, storytelling, and shared reading; therefore, limited access to these can restrict literacy development and reinforce disadvantage.

Low literacy is also associated with poorer health outcomes, as individuals may struggle to interpret medical information or access services effectively (World Health Organization, 2013). Literacy forms the foundation of learning across the curriculum, so early difficulties can significantly limit educational attainment. (Department for Education, 2019). This supports the idea that literacy is foundational rather than subject specific. Research links low literacy with increased involvement in the criminal justice system, as reduced literacy skills limit employment opportunities and increase vulnerability to reoffending (Ministry of Justice, 2012). Overall, these issues demonstrate how low literacy can contribute to cycles of social and economic inequality, which align with Vygotsky's view that learning is strongly influenced by social context and opportunity.

Early literacy development is therefore crucial, as it provides the foundation for lifelong learning (Ofsted, 2024). Supporting literacy from a young age involves engaging children in language-focused experiences through talking, listening, and play. However, some families may struggle to provide consistent support due to time constraints, often linked to work commitments, shift patterns, or multiple caring responsibilities. As a result, parents may have limited opportunities to listen to their children read, engage in shared reading, or have extended conversations that develop vocabulary and language skills. This reduced exposure to language-rich interactions at home can slow literacy development and widen attainment gaps, particularly for children already affected by poverty or deprivation. These early interactions help to develop vocabulary and an understanding of sounds and words before

formal education begins. This aligns with Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, (1936) particularly the preoperational stage (ages 2–7), where children begin to use language, symbols, and imagination key skills that underpin later reading and writing development (McLeod, 2025)

According to Nova (2025), children who struggle with reading and writing are more likely to show reduced engagement in education. Early disengagement from learning can have long-term consequences, as a lack of basic literacy skills is closely linked to unemployment and limited life opportunities. In some cases, this may increase vulnerability to harmful coping strategies, such as involvement in crime, substance misuse, or other risky or exploitative behaviours used to cope with financial hardship.

In conclusion, policies emphasise the importance of early literacy development and inclusive support for all learners; however, in practice, implementation can be challenging. Large class sizes and limited funding can restrict the level of individual attention teachers are able to provide, making it difficult to fully meet the needs of all children, particularly those affected by poverty, deprivation, or Additional Learning Needs (Www.gov.uk, 2026). As a result, although policy frameworks aim to ensure equitable access to literacy support, resource constraints can create barriers that impact how effectively this is achieved in everyday classroom settings (Hillman, Holmes and Duarte, 2025).

Part 2.

Description.

For my assignment, I was tasked with recording a 5-minute video where I read a children's book aloud to children aged 12-15. The book I chose was called 'Mr Barafundle and the rock dragon'. The main objective was to capture the children's attention and keep them engaged throughout the story. To achieve this, I focused on using expressive voice techniques, such as varying my pitch, tone, and pace, to make the story livelier and more interesting. I also planned to ask questions at different points during the reading to encourage the children to think and participate actively, making the experience interactive.

In preparation, I carefully selected a book that was age-appropriate and had engaging illustrations and language. I then practiced reading the story aloud multiple times, experimenting with different vocal variations to see what felt natural and effective. I also planned specific moments where I would pause and pose questions, like "What do you think will happen next?" or "How do you think he feels?" to stimulate their thinking and maintain their interest. Additionally, I set up a quiet, well-lit space for recording and checked that my audio equipment was working properly to ensure clear sound quality.

Feelings.

Before I started recording, I experienced a mix of emotions. On one hand, I was genuinely excited about the opportunity to improve my communication and storytelling skills, knowing that engaging young children requires creativity, enthusiasm, and confidence. I looked forward to seeing how I could bring the story to life and try to make it an enjoyable experience for the children. On the other hand, I also felt a sense of nervousness and

self-doubt. I was concerned about whether I could effectively capture and hold the children's attention through a camera rather than in person. I worried about my ability to sound lively enough and whether my voice would seem engaging over the recording.

As I began reading the story aloud, I noticed my initial nervousness gradually easing. As I immersed myself in the story and started using expressive voice techniques, changing my pitch, tone, and rhythm, I felt my confidence grow. Seeing the responses, even if just in my mind, and imagining the children's reactions motivated me to continue with energy and enthusiasm. The questions I asked seemed to spark curiosity, and I observed that my vocal variety helped create a more dynamic reading experience. Despite this, I still felt self-conscious about my pacing, sometimes rushing through parts or pausing awkwardly and I was aware that my voice could be more varied to better capture attention. I worried that if I did not maintain enough energy or if I stumbled over my words, the children might lose interest. This mix of excitement and anxiety created a tension that I had to work through during the process.

Evaluation.

Overall, my engagement strategies were effective in capturing and maintaining the children's interest during the reading. The questions I asked appeared to stimulate their curiosity and encouraged participation, as I noticed that they responded enthusiastically either verbally or through attentive body language. This confirmed that interactive elements, such as asking questions, are valuable tools in keeping young children engaged and involved in the storytelling process.

Additionally, my use of voice modulation varying pitch, tone, and pace seemed to work well in making the story livelier and more expressive. I observed that when I changed my voice appropriately during exciting or suspenseful parts, the children seemed more captivated, and I was able to convey emotions effectively. These vocal techniques helped bring the story to life and made the story more engaging, which was reflected in the positive responses I perceived.

However, despite these successes, I recognise areas where I could have improved. For instance, my storytelling could have been even more dynamic with the inclusion of more visual gestures, such as using hand movements or facial expressions, to emphasise certain parts of the story. I also realised that incorporating props or visual aids could have added an extra layer of engagement, making the story more immersive and helping visual learners connect better with the material.

Furthermore, I could have paid closer attention to my pacing, ensuring I maintained a steady rhythm that was easy for the children to follow. At times, I found myself speaking too quickly or too slowly, which might have impacted their ability to stay fully engaged. These small adjustments, combined with more physical expressiveness, could have made my storytelling even more exciting.

Analysis.

Using voice variation and asking questions are proven and effective methods for engaging children during storytelling (Victorian Government, 2023). Voice variation changing pitch,

tone, and pace captures their attention by making the story more lively and emotionally expressive (Gupta, 2025). It helps to emphasise key moments, create suspense, and convey different characters or feelings, which makes the story more memorable and enjoyable for young listeners. Similarly, asking questions encourages children to think actively about the story, fostering cognitive engagement and interaction. (Hamp Nursery and Infants' School, 2026). Questions like "What do you think will happen next?" or "How do you think this would make you feel?" prompt children to participate mentally and emotionally, making the experience more immersive and helping to develop their listening and comprehension skills.

Reflecting on my own experience, I realise that my initial nervousness affected my confidence and my delivery at the start. I was worried about how well I would perform and whether I could maintain my energy throughout the reading. However, as I focused on the story itself immersing myself in the narrative, my nerves diminished. This focus allowed me to relax, which in turn helped me become more expressive with my voice and more natural in my delivery. When I was engaged with the story rather than overly concerned with how I was performing, my voice became more animated, and I was able to better connect with the material and, consequently, with the children.

This analysis highlights the importance of concentration and mental presence in storytelling. It suggests that overcoming nervousness and shifting your focus to the story's content can significantly enhance delivery and engagement. It also demonstrates that even if initial confidence is low, practice and genuine involvement in the storytelling process can lead to more expressive and effective communication.

Conclusion.

This experience has reinforced the idea that thorough preparation and genuine enthusiasm are essential components for engaging young audiences effectively. Preparing in advance such as selecting an appropriate book, practicing voice modulation, and planning interactive questions helps build confidence and ensures a smoother delivery (Department for Education, 2023). When I approach storytelling with enthusiasm and energy, it naturally translates into a more exciting experience for the children, making the story more memorable and enjoyable for them (Happy Designer, 2024).

Additionally, I realised that incorporating visual cues, gestures, or props could significantly enhance the storytelling process. According to Speech and language UK (2024), Visual elements can add a dynamic dimension to the story, making it more appealing and easier for children to follow along, especially for visual learners. Using hand movements, facial expressions, or props related to the story can help emphasise key moments and bring characters to life, fostering a more immersive experience. (Blog Administrator, 2024)

Overall, this reflection has highlighted the importance of not only verbal storytelling techniques but also the value of visual and physical engagement. Moving forward, I plan to integrate these elements into my storytelling approach to create even more engaging and lively sessions for children. This experience has shown me that continuous improvement, creativity, and enthusiasm are vital for developing effective communication skills in early childhood education. (White, 2019)

Action Plan.

Moving forward, I will take several practical steps to enhance my storytelling skills and engagement techniques. First, I plan to incorporate more physical gestures, such as hand movements, facial expressions, and body language, to emphasise key parts of the story and make my narration livelier and more expressive (Blog Administrator, 2024). I believe that using these visual cues will help capture the children's attention more effectively and make the storytelling experience more immersive (Happy Designer, 2024).

Second, I will consider using props or visual aids related to the story. For example, I might bring in stuffed animals, pictures, or themed objects that complement the story (The Empowered Educator, 2018). These visual elements can serve as focal points, stimulate curiosity, and help children better understand and connect with the narrative. I will also experiment with incorporating simple visual aids like drawings or flashcards to reinforce key messages.

Third, I recognise the importance of regular practice to boost my confidence and delivery. I plan to record myself multiple times, review my performances, and seek feedback from peers or mentors (The University of Edinburgh, 2024). This will help me identify areas where I can improve my pacing, tone, and expressiveness. I will also practice reading aloud in different settings and with different materials to become more comfortable and versatile in my storytelling approach.

Finally, I will reflect on each recording session to assess what strategies worked well and what could be improved. This ongoing reflection and commitment to development will help me become a more engaging and confident storyteller, creating a more enjoyable and meaningful experience for the children I work with (The University of Edinburgh, 2024).

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