Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

ECEY5004

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Contents sheet

AI Cover Sheet

Section 1: One Drive links for Digital and Traditional Stories

Section 2: 2000 word analysis of storytelling skills and behaviours

Reference list

AI Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the use of Grammarly (https:/www.grammarly.com/) on multiple dates throughout the assignment to check my work using the prompts:

1. Check the text for readability, grammar, and syntax.

I acknowledge the use of Microsoft Copilot (https:/www.microsoftcopilot.com/) on multiple dates throughout the assignment to help find and summarise relevant journal articles, using prompts such as:

1. Find me academic journal articles dated within the past 10 years related to storytelling skills such as tone, pace and imagery.
2. Summarise the article into an easy-to-read format.

I acknowledge the use of Canva (https:/www.canva.com/) on multiple dates, to aid the production of the digital story. Using prompts such as:

1. Waves audio sound effects.
2. Footstep audio effects.
3. Calming musical sound effects.

I confirm that I have not presented any 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 as evidence.

Section 1:

Link for Traditional Story: 8 minutes 31 seconds

https://uowtsd-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/r/personal/2412700_student_uwtsd_ac_uk/Documents/20250930_102245.mp4?csf=1&web=1&e=iYBcXz

Link for Digital Story: 6 minutes 1 second

https://uowtsd-my.sharepoint.com/:v:/r/personal/2412700_student_uwtsd_ac_uk/Documents/ECEY5004%20Digital%20Story-%20Snail%20and%20the%20Whale.mp4?csf=1&web=1&e=W4u5yo

Section 2: 2,000 word analysis on storytelling skills and behaviours

Storytelling is a powerful and intuitive way for children to engage with language and meaning, beginning even before birth through exposure to rhythm, tone and voice (Filipe *et al.,* 2023; Liu *et al.,* 2022). From birth to seven, stories help children make sense of their emotions and the world around them, build their imagination, encourage expressive language and improve listening and communication skills (Ghosh, 2024). These early experiences also support literacy; as children listen to and retell stories, they absorb vocabulary, learn how narratives are structured and begin to understand how language conveys meaning (Vaahtoranta *et al.,* 2019). As digital media becomes part of everyday life, storytelling evolves too, helping children develop digital literacy by engaging in stories across different formats such as videos and audiobooks. According to Maureen, Van der Meij and de Jong (2022), Chlapana and Koniou (2025) and Huang (2025), it is through storytelling that children begin to be exposed to imagery and sensory detail, understand structure and pacing and explore tone, mood and intonation; skills that shape how they speak, listen, express themselves and begin early writing development. Two of these storytelling behaviours will be the focus of this essay.

The first to be explored is the use of imagery. Imagery in both traditional and digital storytelling is suggested to play a significant role in supporting children's development in writing (Lisenbee and Ford, 2018). Through the use of descriptive language and sensory details, storytelling encourages children to visualise scenes, characters and emotions; skills that Wright and Dunsmuir (2019) deemed valuable for expressive and coherent writing, in their study conducted to establish the effects of storytelling at school on children’s oral and written language abilities. Crawshaw, Luke and Ritterfeld (2025) and Demire, Levine and Goldin-Meadow (2015) found that during traditional storytelling, children engage with spoken language and gestures to construct mental images, relying on their imagination to fill in the visual gaps. This process strengthens their ability to describe settings and emotions in writing, using words to recreate what they have visualised. In contrast, digital storytelling offers multimedia elements, such as visuals, sound effects and animations to scaffold children's understanding of how imagery works (Son and Butcher, 2024). Furthermore, Rahiem (2021) suggest that these tools provide

concrete models of descriptive language and help children translate visual and auditory experiences into written form. This aligns with Marsh and Levy's (2011) view that digital imagery is not merely decorative but integral to children's meaning-making. Marsh (2010) highlights how children engage with digital images to explore identity and narrative, while Levy (2011) emphasises the role of visual cues in shared reading, particularly in supporting children's comprehension and expressive language development. Together, they argue that digital storytelling environments offer rich opportunities for multimodal literacy, enabling children to interpret, remix and create meaning through a blend of visual, auditory and textual elements. Both these formats stimulate mental visualisation and imagination, which are foundational for creative writing and narrative construction (Barton *et al.,* 2023; Yamada-Rice, 2021).

Jerome Bruner's narrative theory supports this connection, proposing that children make sense of their world through storytelling and that language is deeply tied to meaning-making. He argued that imagery-rich narratives foster expressive language, enabling children to use writing as a tool for constructing and communicating their understanding of experiences (Bruner, 1991). Bruner (1996), later echoed by Sherwood and Makar (2022), viewed storytelling as a cognitive and cultural activity, where imagination and descriptive detail are central to learning. However, Noam Chomsky's (2006) nativist theory would disagree, instead placing an emphasis on innate acquisition of grammar and syntax, suggesting that children possess an internal language faculty that operates independently from environmental input. From Chomsky's perspective, storytelling and imagery are not essential for language development, as children will acquire linguistic competence regardless of exposure to narrative or sensory-rich content, a view supported by Hopkins (2017) and Tong (2022), who outline Chomsky's Universal Grammar theory and its emphasis on innate mechanisms of language acquisition. This theoretical contrast highlights differing views on the role of imagery in writing: Bruner (1996) supports its function in expressive and imaginative development, while Chomsky (2006) prioritises structural competence.

In practice, imagery is supported differently in traditional and digital storytelling. In the traditional format, the narrator can be seen actively engaging with the audience by using props, facial expressions and showing pages of the physical book. These

elements aid children in visualising the story in real time, encouraging them to imagine movement and emotion based on limited cues (Bruce *et al.,* 2020). Choo, Abdullah and Nawi (2020) corroborated this, explaining that this approach strengthens a child's ability to describe scenes and characters in writing using expressive language and sensory detail. In contrast, digital storytelling presents animated scenes with moving elements while the narrator speaks. An article by Ashikuzzaman (2023) explains that the visuals and sound effects embedded within the video provide children with clear models of action, atmosphere and narrative structure, stating that it "transforms traditional learning into immersive experiences". This format supports writing by offering clear examples of how the descriptive language aligns with visual storytelling, helping children replicate pacing and structure in their own narratives. While digital storytelling fosters imagination and interpretations, it also scaffolds visual clarity, both contributing to the development of descriptive and narrative writing skills (Krisotaki and Castro-Kemp, 2024; Munajah, Sumantri and Yufiarti, 2023; Kahn, Abu Ziden and Khan, 2023).

Ultimately, the use of imagery in storytelling, whether traditional or digital, provides children with opportunities to explore language beyond its grammatical form. By promoting mental visualisation and encouraging imaginative thinking, imagery in storytelling becomes a powerful tool for enhancing children's writing abilities in both educational and creative contexts (McIntyre *et al.,* 2025; Farrar, Arizpe and Lees, 2024).

The next storytelling behaviour to be explored is tone and pace or also known as intonation, and how it supports children's early oracy development. Tone and pace in storytelling is suggested to help children develop spoken language by making stories more engaging and easier to follow (Brodin and Renblad, 2020). The Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Plan highlights storytelling as a developmentally appropriate approach that supports communication, imagination, and emotional well-being in early years settings (Welsh Government, 2024). In traditional storytelling, changes in voice, such as pitch, volume, pace and emotional expression, demonstrate how feelings and meaning can be communicated through speech, which, according to the Curriculum for Wales: Early Years Guidance, can contribute to children's oral language development (Welsh Government, 2022). It is these vocal variations that draw attention to key moments in a story and model expressive

speech that children can imitate. Pace also plays a role in shaping how a story unfolds. Dickson and Morse (2019) highlight how a slower, more deliberate delivery may signal suspense or reflection, allowing children time to absorb meaning and anticipate what comes next. In contrast, faster rhythms often build excitement or urgency, aiding in maintaining engagement (Cremin *et al.,* 1016; Ewing, Callow and Rushton, 2016). These shifts in pacing help children grasp how spoken language can be structured to guide listeners through a narrative. Furthermore, a study by Bartan (2020) found that teachers who varied their storytelling pace held children's attention more effectively and supported their understanding of narrative structure.

However, digital storytelling uses these elements as a foundation to build upon, layering voice with music, sound effects and visual transitions. These multimodal elements reinforce tone and pace, offering children additional cues that support comprehension and expressive speech (Moradi and Chen, 2019; Meier, 2022). A study by Wang (2025) found that as children engage with digital stories, they begin to internalise these patterns, experimenting with their own voice, timing and delivery. This is further supported by Education Scotland (2025), their evidence paper highlights storytelling as a key factor in early speech and language development, they found that through repeated exposure, storytelling becomes not just a source of entertainment and enjoyment but a scaffold for building fluent, expressive communication; a process that strengthens their ability to speak clearly, confidently and with purpose, which are key components of early oral development. Notably, although dated, a study by Hart and Risley (1995) is of significance. They found that during their study of 42 families over two and a half years, analysing the quantity and quality of language that the children were exposed to had a great impact on their variations of expressive and paced speech. While primarily focused on word exposure, the authors noted how intonations, rhythm and pacing influenced how children processed and responded to language. Highlighting that children engaging in emotionally rich speech, including storytelling, helps children internalise language structures and flow (Hart and Risley, 1995).

The relevance of tone, pace and oracy development is also well documented in the work of Lev Vygotsky, whose theory continues to shape contemporary pedagogical practice. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) positions language as both a communicative tool and a cognitive scaffold, suggesting that expressive adult

speech, which is rich in tone, rhythm and pacing, can support children's progression through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He proposed that children acquire language through socially mediated dialogue, in which features such as intonation and pacing serve not as superficial embellishments but as integral tools for constructing meaning and fostering metacognitive development. Recent findings further support Vygotsky's theory. Eberhart *et al.* (2025) found that metacognitive growth is enhanced through structured, reflective speech, echoing Vygotsky's belief that adult-guided dialogue helps children internalise cognitive strategies. Their emphasis on planning, monitoring and adaptive thinking through expressive language directly reflects the ZPD, where adult modelling supports emerging capabilities. Complementing this, Wells and Stackhouse (2016) demonstrate that intonation patterns help children segment information, convey emphasis and interpret emotional cues, all of which contribute to more coherent and confident spoken expression.

However, Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development presents a markedly different view from that of Vygotsky's, particularly in relation to language acquisition and the role of social interaction. Piaget proposed that children progress through a series of universal biologically driven stages: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational, each characterised by distinct ways of thinking (Piaget, 1959). He argued that language emerges as a consequence of cognitive development, not as a catalyst for it. From this perspective, speech reflects the internal thought process rather than a tool for shaping it. Piaget's view is also echoed in studies carried out by Cerovac and Keane (2024), Garg and Singh (2025) and Aslan and Sidabuter (2025). Their studies support Piaget's theory in how his four-stage model informs curriculum design throughout technology education and digital learning environments. Supporting the idea that children's cognitive readiness must guide instructional strategies and curriculum planning. Unlike Vygotsky (1978), who emphasised the importance of socially mediated dialogue and adult modelling, Piaget (1959) viewed learning as a solitary, self-directed process in which children construct knowledge through active exploration of their environment. Consequently, he placed less emphasis on the expressive features of adult speech, focusing instead on the child's internal logic and readiness to assimilate new information.

In practice, tone, pace and intonation shape how stories are delivered and received, whether through live narration or digital media. It can be seen in the videos that traditional storytelling relies on physical presence and vocal nuance. The narrator is slowing down to build suspense, raising pitch to express excitement and pausing for dramatic effect, while also responding to the listeners' reactions in real time (Robin 2018; Ohler, 2020). In contrast, the narrator in the digital story is using voice-over, so they must anticipate audience response and embed emotion through pre-recorded vocal choices. Here, tone is reinforced by music, visuals and editing, while pacing is tightly controlled by scene transitions and timing (Privitera, Fontana and Geronazzo, 2024). Furthermore, Alexander (2019) and Lamber (2021) suggest that both forms of storytelling rely on expressive intonation to guide the audience’s emotional journey, but digital narration demands intentional layering and synchronisation with multimedia elements to achieve the same immersive effect.

In summary, tone, pace and intonation influence how stories are delivered and understood, supporting children's oracy development across traditional and digital formats. While expressive vocal delivery helps children internalise language patterns, digital storytelling layers voice with music, sound effects and visuals to reinforce this. Used thoughtfully, these storytelling techniques can foster confident, fluent speech and support early communication skills (Cushing, 2025; Lewis, 2025).

To conclude this assignment, AI tools enhanced both the research and creative process. Microsoft Copilot (2025) was used to locate recent, peer-reviewed journal articles, streamlining access to credible sources and supporting academic rigour. The use of Canva (2025) enabled the production of a digital video, where AI-assisted tools supported intuitive editing and effective visual storytelling. While these tools supported efficiency, they also presented limitations. AI-generated content required careful review to ensure accuracy and relevance. There are often broken or non-existent links while researching.

Overall, AI served as a supportive resource rather than a substitute for judgment. When used critically and ethically, it can elevate academic and creative work.

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