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AI Statement

AI (co-pilot) has been used in this assignment to search for sources and theorists.

Prompts used:

Academic articles about screen usage

Academic articles about storytelling

Theorists related to language and speech

Introduction

Language and literacy development in early childhood are fundamental to children's cognitive, social, and educational outcomes, beginning from pre-birth exposure to sound and continuing through early narrative and communication skills (Raising Children Network, n.d.). Storytelling is a key pedagogical approach within early years settings, supporting children's oracy, vocabulary development, and literacy through meaningful interaction (Booktrust, n.d.).

As children's experiences increasingly include digital media, practitioners are required to support the development of digital literacy alongside traditional language and literacy practices (Maureen, van der Meij and de Jong, 2020). This assignment analyses two storytelling activities within an early years setting: one traditional storytelling activity and one digital storytelling activity. Drawing on theories of language acquisition and socio-cultural learning, the paper explores how storytelling supports children's oracy, reading, writing, and digital literacy from pre-birth to seven years. The practices observed are critically analysed and compared in relation to relevant theory and research, with consideration given to the effectiveness of different storytelling approaches and their implications for early years practice.

Benefits of Storytelling

Storytelling plays a significant role in supporting children's language development from pre-birth through to early childhood. Research suggests that exposure to sound patterns, rhythm, and intonation during pregnancy and infancy contributes to early auditory processing and language readiness (Movalled *et al.*, 2023; Mariani *et al.*, 2023).

Activities such as singing, nursery rhymes, and oral storytelling support early stages of language acquisition, including cooing and babbling, by encouraging vocalisation and turn-taking between adults and infants (Goldstein and Schwade, 2008; Morgan and Wren, 2018). From a behaviourist perspective, these early interactions are reinforced through repetition and positive feedback, supporting the development of early

communication skills (Bruner, 1957).

Research into early language development shows that the foundations for communication and later literacy are established in infancy, before the emergence of spoken words. Infants frequently produce speech-like sounds known as ‘protophones,’ which dominate early vocal activity and reflect active exploration of sound that supports later language development (Oller *et al.*, 2021). Early literacy research also highlights that communication is an embodied and social process, involving movement, vocalisation, and shared engagement with books and adults. Hedemark and Lindberg (2018) demonstrate that early literacy experiences, such as shared reading and songs, rely on responsive adult mediation to support infants’ communication and engagement. These findings reinforce the importance of quality and interactive language environments in the earliest stages of development, providing the foundation upon which later storytelling and literacy practices are built.

As children progress into toddlerhood, storytelling continues to support the holophrastic stage and early lexical development, during which single words are used to convey whole meanings and vocabulary begins to expand rapidly. Exposure to stories provides children with repeated opportunities to encounter new words within meaningful and contextualised language experiences, supporting early vocabulary growth (Hoff, 2018; Flack, Field and Horst, 2018). According to Chomsky’s theory of innate language capacity, children are biologically predisposed to acquire language; however, this capacity requires rich linguistic input to develop effectively, which storytelling can provide through structured language exposure (Chomsky, 1965). In addition, Bruner emphasises the importance of narrative in children’s meaning-making, suggesting that storytelling supports children’s understanding of structure, sequence, and cause and effect relationships, which are essential for language development and later literacy skills (Bruner, 1986).

Between the ages of two and seven, storytelling becomes increasingly interactive, promoting the development of questioning and extended speech. Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory highlights the importance of social interaction in learning, and storytelling offers opportunities for adults to scaffold children’s language within the

zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978; Hoff, 2018; Ford *et al.*, 2020). Through shared storytelling experiences, children develop listening skills, expressive language, and early narrative competence, all of which form the foundation for later literacy development (Ford *et al.*, 2020). Overall, storytelling provides a developmentally appropriate and inclusive approach to supporting language and literacy across early childhood.

Storytelling, literacy and Digital literacy

Oracy plays a central role in children's language and literacy development, providing the foundation upon which reading and writing skills are built. Storytelling supports the development of oracy by encouraging children to listen, respond, question, and articulate ideas within a meaningful social context. Shared storytelling experiences promote dialogue, turn-taking, and extended speech, supporting children's confidence in communication and their ability to engage in discourse with others (Hibbin, 2016; Lodge, 2020). Through repeated exposure to stories, children encounter rich vocabulary and varied sentence structures, contributing to both expressive and receptive language development.

Storytelling also plays an important role in supporting the development of early writing skills by helping children understand how ideas are organised and communicated. Through exposure to stories, children become familiar with narrative structures such as sequencing, characters, and events, which supports their ability to organise thoughts when engaging in mark-making and early writing activities. Storytelling encourages children to retell events, invent stories, and represent meaning through symbols, drawings, and early written forms, all of which are recognised as key components of emergent writing. From a developmental perspective, children's early attempts at writing are closely linked to their oral language skills, as spoken language provides the foundation for expressing ideas in written form (Smith, 2019; Hoff, 2018).

This connection between oracy and early writing is also reflected in statutory guidance for early years settings, which emphasises communication, language, and literacy as

core areas of learning that should be supported through interactive experiences (Welsh Government, 2025). Adult-supported storytelling allows practitioners to model written language, introduce story language, and support children in translating spoken narratives into visual or written representations, facilitating the transition from oracy to early writing (Clay, 2015).

In contemporary early years settings, storytelling increasingly incorporates digital elements, requiring practitioners to support children's digital literacy alongside traditional language and literacy skills. Digital literacy involves not only using technology but also engaging with digital texts in confident, creative, and meaningful ways. Within the Curriculum for Wales, digital competence is identified as a cross-curricular skill to be developed alongside literacy and numeracy, highlighting the importance of integrating digital experiences into everyday learning (Welsh Government, 2022). Digital storytelling allows children to engage with multimodal texts that combine images, sound, and spoken language, supporting meaning-making through multiple forms of representation.

Research suggests that digital storytelling can positively influence children's engagement and attitudes towards learning when used purposefully (Alderbashi, 2021), and evidence indicates that technology supported literacy activities can support early reading skills in preschool settings (Verhoeven *et al.*, 2020). However, studies also highlight that practitioners' confidence and competence with digital technologies significantly influence how effectively such tools are used in early years settings, and that digital experiences are not always integrated consistently or meaningfully in practice (Aubrey and Dahl, 2014). In addition, research cautions that excessive or unmediated screen exposure may negatively impact young children's cognitive development, with international guidance recommending limits on sedentary screen time in early childhood, reinforcing the need for adult guided, developmentally appropriate digital storytelling (World Health Organization, 2019; Guellai *et al.*, 2022). When carefully scaffolded, digital storytelling can complement traditional storytelling rather than replace rich, interactive language experiences.

Activity Analysis

The traditional story telling activity observed involved a practitioner (myself) reading the story 'Our Cat Cuddles' (Phinn, 2002) to a small group of five year old children, using a range of interactive strategies to support language and literacy development. In this activity, the practitioner (myself) intentionally used questioning, expressive storytelling, and active listening to scaffold children's oracy and emergent literacy skills.

Throughout the activity, the practitioner paused regularly to ask questions directly related to the narrative, encouraging children to predict events, recall details, and express their ideas. This use of questioning promoted active participation and supported the development of oracy by providing opportunities for children to engage in dialogue and extended speech. Research highlights that oral storytelling creates valuable spaces for interaction and shared meaning making, supporting children's expressive language and communication skills (Hibbin, 2016).

The practitioner also modelled active listening by holding her hand to her ear, providing a clear visual cue that reinforced the importance of listening and turn taking. This supported children's understanding of conversational norms and encouraged them to listen to both the practitioner and their peers. This emphasis on turn taking and shared participation reflects research which suggests that children's storytelling competence is interactionally achieved through opportunities to contribute and respond within group contexts (Theobald, 2016). From a socio-cultural perspective, such interaction aligns with Vygotsky's view that learning occurs through social engagement, with the practitioner scaffolding children's language through responsive questioning and discussion, a process also emphasised in Bruner's theory of narrative and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1986; Alharbi, 2023). However, while this approach supported engagement, its effectiveness depended on the balance between open and closed questions, as overly directive questioning may limit children's opportunities to initiate ideas independently.

Expressive use of tone, intonation, rhythm, and pacing further enhanced the storytelling experience. Pauses were used to build suspense, while faster rhythm was introduced during rhyming sections of the story, supporting children's attention and enjoyment and

drawing focus to sound patterns and prosody. The practitioner's clear articulation and variation in voice provided rich language input and modelled fluent oral storytelling. The repeated rhythmic and rhyming elements of the story may also support language learning through repetition and reinforcement, reflecting behaviourist principles of learning (Skinner, 1957). Hibbin (2016) suggests that oral storytelling practices are often under utilised in educational contexts, highlighting the value of the observed activity as effective practice.

In addition, the use of gestures and physical props supported children's engagement and comprehension, making the narrative more concrete and interactive (Greimann, 2017). Allowing children to handle the props encouraged active involvement and provided visual and tactile cues that reinforced story meaning. This multimodal approach supported inclusion by accommodating diverse learning styles and reinforcing narrative understanding, consistent with research highlighting the power of picture books as multimodal literacy tools (Crawford, Killingsworth and Lacina, 2024). However, careful management was required to ensure that the use of props enhanced rather than distracted from the narrative. Overall, the activity demonstrated how traditional storytelling, when delivered interactively and expressively, can effectively support children's oracy and emergent literacy while requiring thoughtful practitioner judgement to balance engagement with purposeful learning.

The digital storytelling activity involved the practitioner (myself) reciting *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (Rosen and Oxenbury, 1989) while a video animation played in the background. As with the traditional storytelling activity, expressive use of tone, intonation, rhythm, and pacing was central to engaging the children and supporting their understanding of the narrative. This demonstrates continuity in pedagogical approach, as key oral storytelling strategies were maintained across both traditional and digital formats. The digital medium enhanced the storytelling experience by providing visual cues that reinforced meaning, while the practitioner's voice remained the primary vehicle for language modelling and interaction (Hibbin, 2016).

A key linguistic feature of *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* is the repeated use of onomatopoeia, such as "swish swish" and "squelch squelch". These sound-symbolic

words draw children's attention to phonological patterns, rhythm, and sound–meaning relationships within language. Research indicates that onomatopoeia play a significant role in early language development, as their iconic (sound symbolic) nature makes them easier for young children to perceive and produce (Laing, 2019). The practitioner emphasised these onomatopoeic elements through exaggerated intonation and strategic pauses, encouraging children to anticipate and join in with repeated phrases. This active participation supported oracy by promoting vocalisation, confidence, and shared enjoyment of language, while also supporting phonological awareness, a key foundation for early reading development (Goswami, 2015). In addition, research suggests that repeated exposure to the same story enhances young children's word learning and retention by reducing cognitive load and supporting attention to new vocabulary within context (Horst, 2013).

The digital animation supported children's comprehension by visually representing the environments described in the story, such as long grass and mud, reinforcing vocabulary and narrative sequencing. However, the practitioner's role remained essential in mediating the digital content, ensuring that children's attention was directed towards the language rather than passive viewing. Research highlights that practitioners' confidence and competence with digital technologies significantly influence how effectively digital tools support learning, reinforcing the importance of purposeful adult involvement in digital storytelling activities (Aubrey and Dahl, 2014).

Overall, the digital storytelling activity complemented the traditional storytelling approach by extending engagement through multimodal elements while retaining a strong focus on oral language. The repetition of expressive storytelling strategies across both activities highlights the importance of practitioner led interaction in supporting children's oracy, early literacy, and digital competence (Aubrey and Dahl, 2014).

Conclusion

This assignment has explored the role of storytelling in supporting children's language and literacy development from pre-birth to seven years, drawing on theory, research,

and reflective practice. Evidence from language development research demonstrates that early exposure to sound, rhythm, and social interaction provides a foundation for later oracy, reading, and writing skills (Vygotsky, 1978). Analysis of traditional and digital storytelling activities highlighted how practitioner-led strategies, including expressive delivery, questioning and repetition effectively scaffold children's learning. While digital storytelling can enhance engagement through visual and auditory elements, the findings emphasise the importance of adult mediation to ensure meaningful interaction rather than passive screen use (Aubrey and Dahl, 2014). Reflecting on my own practice enabled the application of theory to early years contexts and supported the development of professional and digital skills. Overall, storytelling is shown to be an inclusive and developmentally appropriate approach to promoting children's oracy, literacy, and digital competence (Hibbin, 2016).

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