



ECEY5004 Language and Literacy in the Digital Age

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Basic Acknowledgement format of AI tool use:

I acknowledge the use of AI Tool throughout this study 18th October to 2nd November 2025

I used the prompt(s):

1. Co-pilot, google to find resources
2. Co-pilot to summarise articles
3. Grammarly to check spelling and grammar, along with plagiarism.

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 in evidence.

Introduction

Storytelling from pre-birth to age seven has a positive impact on children's language and literacy acquisition, laying the foundations for oracy, writing, and reading development. Research highlights that exposure to familiar voices and rhythmic patterns before birth can promote early phonological awareness. (DeCasper & Spence, 1986; Moon *et al.*, 2013). Throughout early childhood, storytelling supports narrative skills, attention, memory, and cognitive development (Bruner, 1986) while Vygotsky's theory fosters emotional connections, curiosity, and social interaction (MacBlain, 2021). Moreover, sharing cultural and traditional stories enriches children's identity and sense of belonging (Kuswardani *et al.*, 2025).

This paper examines two storytelling activities designed to promote children's language and literacy. The first is a traditional reading of *Pumpkin Soup*, shared in an outdoor woodland setting, with props to encourage sensory engagement and imaginative participation, promoting sensory literacy. This story is about friendship, conflict, consequences and resolution. The second story is a digital reading of a humorous wordplay book called *Oi Frog!* and is delivered digitally, prioritising phonological and visual literacy. The storyteller appears in the corner of the screen, using expressive intonation to capture attention and highlight rhyming words. By comparing these two approaches, this paper explores how storytelling behaviours, specifically intonation and gesture, contribute to children's language, literacy and digital literacy development, drawing on relevant theory and research.

Storytelling Behaviour 1: Intonation

Throughout both storytelling activities, the storyteller demonstrated intonation as a means of conveying emotion, attitude and meaning, supporting children in recognising and understanding feelings, and modelled how emotions can be expressed appropriately, which significantly enhances children's oracy development and understanding. The storyteller uses a varied tone and pitch reflecting shifting emotions, such as sadness when they think the duck is not coming home, to fear when they feel duck is lost in the woods, to joy when the friends are reunited and in the digital story, the impatience of cat and surprise when the dog sits on the frog, bringing characters and scenes to life. Using lively, changing voices with intonation and adding an element of performance encourages children to experiment with their own voices (Cremin *et al.*, 2017). This directly aligns with the Language, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) progression Step 1 (Welsh Government, 2020) and contributes to the Four Purposes of Curriculum for Wales by nurturing ambitious and capable learners who communicate effectively and creatively. (Welsh Government, 2022).

Research shows that when adults model expressive intonation, children observe and imitate them (Bonvillian, 1979). Furthermore, adult scaffolding and shared interactive storytelling enable children to internalise language patterns and emotional cues, which are powerful vehicles for development (Tomasello, 2003). However, Pinker (1994) argues that children will inevitably acquire language as part of their natural development if exposed to diverse language opportunities, rather than as something that needs to be taught.

In both stories, the storyteller uses intonation to signal narrative structure. The storyteller begins bilingually, signalling to the audience that it is story time, with an energetic tone as both stories are introduced. Using a warm, slower pace, the storyteller employs a softer emphasis on the descriptive words with a slight musical rhythm to set the scene during the *Pumpkin Soup* story. This approach invites children to listen, introducing the characters in a comforting and predictable way that young children can tune into, allowing them to engage with descriptive vocabulary. Whereas in the digital story *Oi Frog!*, the storyteller explains to the listeners that the

story will be shared on the screen digitally, introduces the main character on the front page, explaining what an illustrator is and begins the story with a sharp, assertive voice of the cat. The formats are similar in that the beginning of each story is introduced similarly.

In the traditional story, the middle section features a more animated pitch with variation, creating a sense of energy and maintaining high engagement. When the conflict begins, the storyteller uses a sharper tone and faster pace, signalling tension. The storyteller uses short pauses after each question directed at the audience, giving listeners time to react. Studies have found that children need exposure to these cues to learn to anticipate conversational turn-taking (Keitel *et al.*, 2013). However, (Fisher *et al.*, 2007) found that children with developmental language disorder may struggle to process intonation cues unless further support is put in place, such as metaphoric gestures or facial expressions. These shifts in tone mark transitions from calm to conflict and cue children that something is happening, helping them emotionally track the disagreement.

The storyteller uses a repetitive rising intonation throughout the digital story. When there is a question, this cue is a signal that a response is required. While Saindon *et al.*, (2016) argues that exposing children to rising intonation in both questions and statements repeatedly strengthens its usefulness as a cue for understanding, David Crystal (1969) cautions there is risk of oversimplifying prosodic function, highlighting the importance of contextual and attitudinal meaning rather than a fixed grammatical rule of a rising intonation always being referred to as a question or a statement. This implies that intonation modelling should be used alongside contextual cues rather than in isolation.

A falling tone and slower pace are used to signal emotions and promote empathy when duck leaves and the characters are sad. Adults using prosodic vocal cues help scaffold children's ability to follow the story, make predictions, understand meaning, recognise narrative structures, key vocabulary and build listening comprehension.

The storyteller concludes the traditional story with a warm tone, like the beginning, to provide emotional closure, signalling vocal patterns, and reinforcing early literacy skills, such as phonological awareness. However, using a rising tone at the end leaves the story open, inviting children to imagine, discuss and extend what could

happen next, as another potential conflict arises. This creates an opportunity to expand the story through discussion, supporting children's language development and prediction. Modelling this technique supports progression Steps 1 and 2 (Welsh Government, 2020), focusing on oracy, imagination and critical thinking. Encouraging children to use and interpret tone, predict outcomes and work collaboratively develops children's metalinguistic awareness, which is a foundation for later reading skills.

By contrast, the digital story concluded with a humorous twist, with a rising tone of surprise as the dog sits on the log, prompting laughter and engagement rather than further discussion. Retelling or adapting the story could extend learning, supporting phonological awareness through rhyming wordplay. Kory-Westlund (2017) argues that adults who use expressive intonation during storytelling promote children's retention of new words and can correctly use these words when retelling the story, as opposed to children who were exposed to a narrator who read the story in a flat voice. Exaggerated vocal expression across both traditional and digital formats thus reinforces narrative sequencing, encouraging children to use expressive speech in their own storytelling, bridging spoken language with digital creativity.

Storytelling Behaviour 2: Gestures

Gestures play a vital part in children's early language, cognitive and literacy development. Acting as powerful visual tools and predictors, they are integral to thinking and language acquisition, as they reflect and shape cognitive processes according to Goldin-Meadow (2009). The storyteller's use of gestures throughout both activities provides essential visual cues that support children's comprehension, focus and expressive communication. For example, pointing to the book's title and characters, circling features with the cursor during the digital version of *Oi Frog*, directs children's attention and reinforces links between spoken and written words. This supports the findings of Rohlfing *et al.*, (2017) and Rowe *et al.*, (2008), who note that pointing gestures guide children's attention and scaffold their word learning by supporting connections between vocabulary and referents.

In both storytelling formats, gestures worked alongside language to enhance oracy, narrative competence and memory. Paivio's (1990) Dual Coding Theory proposes

that when combining verbal and nonverbal information cues, they are more effective for children to process, thereby promoting richer mental representations and enhancing comprehension and recall. The storyteller demonstrated this using animated gestures, such as “stirring the soup” or pretending to “slurp”, allowing children to visualise story events. These embodied actions supported children in building connections between spoken narrative and their sensory experiences. Hostetter and Alibali (2008) and Goldin-Meadow (2011) similarly argue that gestures help form mental representations and facilitate recall and understanding, as abstract concepts are more tangible.

Gestures also play a pivotal role in supporting inclusivity and communication for children with language delay. Vallotton (2012) reports that modelling gestures bridges communication gaps between verbal and nonverbal communication, providing children with a means to express meaning even before speech is fully developed. Wray (2017) similarly observed that children with developmental language disorders often rely on gestures to support understanding and participation in conversation. By modelling expressive gestures and facial expressions, the storyteller enabled children of varying language abilities to engage actively and confidently, supporting oracy and comprehension development through multimodal expression. However, Aitchison (1996) cautions against assuming that gestures are universal and obvious.

Furthermore, gesture-enriched storytelling can support early reading and writing development. By linking physical movement with story sequencing, children strengthen memory for narrative order and descriptive vocabulary, which are skills for later reading comprehension, according to Demir *et al.* (2015). Gestures such as pointing to text or images, turning pages and miming action also promote fine motor coordination and hand-eye control, which are paramount for mark making and early writing skills (Puranik & Lonigan; BookTrust, n.d.). When children physically explore books and imitate gestures, they develop both symbolic understanding and mechanical skills, which are the foundations for writing readiness. These techniques were demonstrate by the storyteller in the traditional story using a pincer grip to pick up salt, holding their hand to their head to look for duck, stirring the spoon, raises their hand and shoulder when the cat says ‘he’ll be back’, pointing to pictures and words throughout the story and turning the pages during the traditional tale.

Finally, gestures bridge traditional and digital literacy. In the digital storytelling activity, the storyteller used on-screen gestures, such as cursor movement and expressive body language, to guide children's focus and emphasise rhyming patterns. This supports the cross-curriculum skills for digital competence and literacy framework, enabling learners to interpret multimodal information and navigate digital texts meaningfully (Welsh Government, 2022). Throughout, the storyteller's gestures were less visible on screen, but their expressive use of voice and facial expression maintained engagement and comprehension.

Overall, the integration of gesture within storytelling provides a powerful, multimodal, holistic approach to literacy, promoting oracy, vocabulary development, memory and early reading and writing skills. By combining movement, expression, and narrative, children not only understand stories more deeply but also learn how to communicate, represent, and create meaning across both traditional and digital contexts, which are key aims of the curriculum for Wales.

In the traditional story, the storyteller uses facial expressions, glances back and forth from the book to the audience and eye contact to keep children engaged. However, in the digital story the storyteller appears at the top right-hand side of the screen; although facial expressions are used throughout and a hand gesture to describe a flute, the viewer may struggle to pick up on these gestures as the screen in which the storyteller appears is small in comparison to the book, therefore children's focus would be on the images rather than the narrator's gestures.

Gestures alongside expressive intonation create a holistic, multimodal storytelling approach that nurtures oracy, creativity and literacy. Together, they enable children to interpret and express meaning through multiple modes of communication, supporting the Curriculum for Wales' aspiration for ambitious, capable learners and healthy, confident individuals who can communicate effectively and imaginatively across traditional and digital contexts.

Conclusion

Throughout this assignment, I have developed greater confidence in analysing academic sources and critically reflecting on my own storytelling skills. I found that peer-reviewed articles offer more substantial and reliable evidence than professional websites such as BookTrust. When locating sources using Artificial Intelligence, I cross-referenced these via Google Scholar and academic online tools. I preferred the format of the in-person traditional story activity because it feels like connections can be built with the audience through shared engagement. In contrast, the digital story relied on cursor movement and vocal intonation, with limited facial gestures due to screen size. In the future, I would record myself interacting with the digital story on screen to enhance expressiveness. Despite initial doubts, when I later read both stories to the children in my setting, they responded well to both formats, especially enjoying the sensory elements of *Pumpkin Soup* when I splashed them with the soup at the end, and engaging with the rhyming in the digital story *Oi Frog!*. This experience also enhanced my digital skills, when sourcing software to convert PDFs into an interactive format FLIPHTML5.

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