

I acknowledge the use of copilot on 21-22-25th October to search for references and research in relation to storytelling.

I used the prompts:

1. Please find me references in the last 10 years in relation to expressive language
2. Please find me references in the last 10 years in relation to pausing in storytelling
3. Please find me references in the last 10 years in relation to rhythm and repetition in storytelling

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work.

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.

Contents page

- Language and literacy in the digital age Paper 1836 word count
- Reference list

Introduction

This paper will focus on the benefits of storytelling through language and literacy and outline why it is an important tool for children. The engagement of stories enables children to be exposed to an abundance of rich vocabulary and expressive language. When children listen to stories and then retell those stories, it enhances their comprehension, sequencing, and verbal fluency, whilst also aiding their imagination. Storytelling enables children to ask questions, promote curiosity, and act as a natural engagement with language. It provides a gateway to learning by enhancing a child's listening, reading, and oracy skills.

In today's digital world, storytelling has evolved, providing new forms through interactive e-books, digital storytelling videos, and storytelling apps. This enables children to navigate, interpret, and create content responsibly. This mix of traditional and digital storytelling

encourages critical thinking and creativity, along with opportunities for children to progress within a future that is rich in technology. The research within this paper will focus primarily on the following storytelling behaviors. Pausing, expressive storytelling, rhythm and repetition.

Firstly, a great way to foster oracy in children is to pause during storytelling so that the children can digest language, come up with answers, and practice dialogic thinking. According to Vygotsky's social-cultural theory, in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) hereafter, learning happens through social interaction and scaffolding in learning. These pauses act as cognitive breathing spaces, allowing children to operate within their ZPD. This is where storytelling plays a key role in enhancing a child's learning journey. By pausing, children can actively make predictions, pose queries, or recite passages in their own words. According to studies conducted in 2016, well-timed pauses enhance attention and promote emergent literacy by allowing children the opportunity to think, conclude, and predict the story's development (Cremin *et al.*, 2016).

For example, Bartan (2020) discovered that teachers who purposefully paused during storytelling saw an increase in a child's attention span. This study also found that teachers/practitioners generally used the method of using a storytelling book to read a story. However, this study concluded that the effective use of audio-visual elements in storytelling methods was the most effective factor for children to understand the story and focus on it for a long time. In both the traditional method and the digital method of storytelling in part one of this module, you can see that she has used pauses throughout to gain the children's attention and to extend their understanding of the story. This storytelling behaviour can be used within different methods of storytelling to enhance the children's knowledge and to expand their understanding of the story.

Furthermore, the Education Endowment Foundation emphasises how deliberate language modelling, which includes deliberate pauses, supports expressive language and grammar in children during storytelling (Taylor, 2023). To illustrate this point, one might refer to Jerome Bruner's theory of narrative thought. This suggests that storytelling is a basic way for children to create meaning in a story rather than just being entertained.

Bruner states that children learn through symbolic, iconic, and enactive representation and that by pausing, the child can move between these stages and reflect on the elements of the story. This scaffolding approach supports children in developing their expressive language and grammar. An example of this is a study carried out by Wright & Dunsmuir, (2019), who state that their findings from 12 studies in a systematic review highlighted that teacher-led storytelling, which includes deliberate pausing, significantly improved the children's written and oral outcomes. Additionally, a systematic review by Pillinger & Vardy, (2022) highlights how pausing during storytelling engages children to actively participate and enhance their oral language. The review concluded that when teachers/practitioners pause to ask open-ended questions or wait for a child's response, it demonstrated an improvement in the children's vocabulary and comprehension skills. One example can be seen in part one of this module during the traditional/digital storytelling practical session. In which you can hear the practitioner ask, "Who do we think is at the door?" "Why did Mummy and Sophie get tiger food?".

Additionally, when practitioners pause, it gives a child time to vocalise what they want to say Abayan, (2023) who states how important moments of silence (pausing) are during storytelling and how they can help foster children's emotional regulation and deepen their processing skills within language development. This further highlights the need and the value that pausing has within storytelling and what an important tool it is within teaching.

Another storytelling behaviour that develops children's oracy skills is expressive storytelling by exposing them to rich and powerful language. Dobinson & Dockrell (2021) state that expressive language can be used to enhance speaking and listening skills. Take for example a study that was carried out in 2019 which aimed at identifying an improvement in both oral, written and self-awareness in children aged between 6-7 years of age. The study looked at the differences between children being read to within a traditional storytelling environment with a practitioner. The findings suggest that storytelling would be beneficial to practitioners to help aid in the contribution to class discussions as well as greater engagement with their language and literacy skills (Wright & Dunsmuir, 2019). This relates to Vygotsky's social cultural theory which states that language development is key to social interaction in which storytelling offers a scaffolding

environment in which to practice in. Furthermore, Doherty, (2023) argues that oracy should be central to the curriculum. Using data from education and psycholinguistics showed that through expressive storytelling children can become fluent communicators, which encourages active listening and aids in verbal responses. Eventually, the children can retell the stories through social interaction with their peers.

An equally important aspect is when expressive storytelling engages the children through voice, gestures and performance. A recent study conducted by Maureen *et al.*, (2022) states the unlimited benefits that expressive story telling has for early years education. In which both oral and digital methods improved early literacy outcomes. Rahiem, (2021) also agrees with how expressive storytelling combined with digital technology improves outcomes. The study explored how digital expressive storytelling blends with traditional storytelling. Rahiem, (2021) is convinced that this form of storytelling is essential for developing 21st century skills in early years. This form of storytelling aids children with additional learning needs that require more visual structures. The digital storytelling in part one of this module highlights how significant digital storytelling is and by pausing the story on the screen and discussing the images breaks things down for the listener. For instance, “she asks the children why do you think Sophie bought a big tin of tiger food” This highlights the fact that storytelling is not just for entertainment but a teaching tool that fosters vocabulary, comprehension and narrative structure which keeps children engaged. Cremin *et al.*, (2016) believe that storytelling and story acting provide a rich environment in culture and language development. Especially when children are encouraged to participate in the stories and to create stories of their own. This relates to Bruner’s (1961) theory of narrative cognition which suggests that children gain knowledge and meaning through active experiences within the world around them. Bruner’s narrative construction theory suggests that storytelling plays a key role in how children interpret reality and imagination. Additionally, Dubiel, (2023) highlights that stories help children with emotional literacy and social development. By supporting children to articulate feelings, understanding other people’s point of view and developing empathy skills.

Another example of storytelling behaviour is repetition one aspect of repetition during storytelling is the repeated exposure to language patterns. One example of this is in both the traditional and digital storytelling in part one of this module. During the story of The Tiger Who Came to Tea the repetition behaviour within this story is seen when the tiger has an uncontrollable appetite in which he eats all the food and all the drink in the house. The storyteller also highlights this by emphasising the word all throughout the story. McGrath, (2025) points out that the beneficial aspects of hearing stories 'again and again' help children grasp the structure of the story and build expressive fluency. By revisiting familiar stories children foster emotional insight allowing children to explore the different characters, plot outcomes and adapting their language skills. Similarly, Rafiola *et al.*, (2022) demonstrated that repeated exposure to familiar stories enhanced memory retention especially stories that were revisited across multiple sessions.

This relates to Piaget's theory of cognitive development which emphasises the importance of repetition in strengthening schemas and supporting movement from concrete to symbolic thinking.

Additionally, repetition is a key element for reinforcing vocabulary and sentence structure in early childhood. Repetition in storybooks significantly improves word learning amongst early years as the repeated exposure to targeted vocabulary enhanced learning outcomes (Horst *et al.*, 2011). To illustrate this point further Williamson *et al.*, (2023) highlighted that repeated storytelling in early education deepens a child's understanding of language.

Another way of using repetition is by reading stories that use certain words repeatedly. "Books like Brown Bear, Brown Bear what did you see?" Or "Where Going on a Bear Hunt" are all examples of how repetition builds confidence and linguistic rhythm. To illustrate this point Fiveash *et al.*, (2023) says that exposure to regular rhythmic patterns improves grammar and helps promote fluency and supports the development of language skills. Rosati (2024) agrees also with the importance of rhythm and repetition in storytelling and how it plays a vital role in shaping a child's linguistic rhythm, storytelling especially nursery rhyme's support narrative thinking and early literacy and expressive fluency. It also aids children to absorb the pace of the spoken language.

We can argue further by a study conducted by Zhong & Guo (2022) found that rhythmic repetition in classroom storytelling enhanced children's ability to predict language patterns particularly in multilingual settings.

In conclusion, storytelling is a dynamic teaching tool shaped by intentional behaviours that provide language, cognitive and emotional development. Pausing, expressive language and rhythm and repetition are not just choices that practitioners use, they are crucial tools that shape how children experience and process stories. Children are supported to think and make predictions when they pause. This promotes active listening, creates space for reflection, and allows children to engage and build comprehension. Expressive language enhances vocabulary and helps stories come to life through tone, gesture and emotion. Meanwhile, rhythm and repetition provide scaffolding that support fluency, memory retention, and phonological awareness. To support my analysis further, there appeared to be more research on expressive storytelling than the other behaviours chosen in this module. The latest research from 2024 appears to be on expressive language including an interesting study that found that combining storytelling with physical movement helped improve both language and motor skills in reception aged children (Breese, 2024). By embedding these techniques into practitioners' daily practice, it will strengthen a child's language development. Making stories meaningful is the aim for storytelling behaviours besides simply making them for entertainment they support children to listen, speak, think, and connect with stories while also providing emotional development.

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