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Storytelling Analysis: Reflective Comparison of Paper and Digital Storytelling Practices

Storytelling is one of the most powerful pedagogical tools in early education, shaping language, imagination, and emotional understanding from infancy onwards. It is both an ancient tradition and a modern educational strategy that bridges communication, culture, and creativity. Engaging with stories supports oracy, comprehension, and vocabulary development, which underpin children's early reading and writing progression (Cremin et al., 2016). Storytelling encourages children to listen attentively, predict events, and explore new vocabulary, while offering opportunities for social interaction and emotional growth. In the early years, it provides a foundation for later literacy, and as children develop, it continues to strengthen linguistic structure, critical thinking and creativity.

In my two storytelling recordings using Wilson's (2002) *The Bear Snores On*, I explored how different formats traditional print and digital storytelling each contribute to literacy and digital literacy development. The first recording involved reading the printed story aloud with expressive voices, sound effects, and questioning, while the second used a YouTube video that animated the book as I narrated over it. This reflection analyses the storytelling behaviours I demonstrated, the skills these encouraged, and how both formats supported the development of literacy and digital literacy. It draws on Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and Bruner's constructivist perspective, supported by recent research and Welsh educational guidance.

In the first recording, I focused on creating a lively, expressive performance that mirrored the interaction of a shared story experience. The session began with an introduction designed to spark curiosity and prior knowledge, asking, "What do we think this book could be about?" and mentioning the concept of hibernation. This approach supported schema activation, linking new information with what learners already know (Cremin et al., 2018). Although the reading was performed for recording rather than a live audience, I maintained eye contact, pauses and tonal variation to simulate a natural, conversational delivery. This aligns closely with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of mediation, where language acts as a cultural tool to construct and share meaning. Through tone, rhythm and emphasis, I was modelling

language use and demonstrating expressive communication key aspects of literacy learning (Flewitt et al., 2019).

Vygotsky's (1978) idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) underpins the importance of guided support in storytelling. The storyteller's voice, tone, and questioning scaffold understanding, guiding learners towards deeper interpretation of events and emotions. My use of open-ended prompts and rhetorical pauses aimed to simulate this form of scaffolding, encouraging prediction and critical listening. Bruner (1983) later developed this notion of scaffolding, emphasising that stories provide structured, predictable frameworks through which learners make sense of experience. In performing *The Bear Snores On*, I observed how the story's cyclical rhythm and build up naturally scaffold understanding, offering multiple entry points for learners to engage with narrative patterns.

Piaget's (1952) cognitive developmental theory is also particularly relevant to storytelling. Piaget proposed that learning occurs through active exploration, pattern recognition and repetition. The story's refrain "But the bear snores on" invites repetition and anticipation, encouraging cognitive participation. Repetitive structures not only enhance memory but also support phonological awareness and oral fluency (Daniels and Phelps, 2021). By deliberately pausing before the repeated line, I aimed to invite mental participation and build rhythm, modelling the kind of pattern recognition that supports later reading comprehension.

My expressive use of character voices, exaggerated tone and rhythm demonstrates what Cremin et al. (2016) term the "performative dimension" of literacy pedagogy. They argue that effective storytelling engages the body as well as the voice, turning reading into a multimodal act. Through gesture, expression, and dynamic pacing, I aimed to animate the emotional world of the story. These techniques align with Bruner's (1996) view that learning through narrative is not only cognitive but also affective stories enable learners to connect emotionally and morally to the content. This embodied form of storytelling is especially effective for promoting empathy and imagination, both of which are central to the aims of early literacy frameworks.

The pedagogical value of storytelling is reinforced within the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022), which positions language, literacy and communication as core to the holistic development of all learners. Storytelling aligns with the

curriculum's emphasis on exploration, creativity and collaboration. It enables learners to listen, interpret, and share ideas while developing a sense of identity and belonging. Cremin and Flewitt (2017) highlight that storytelling cultivates empathy and reflective thought, qualities essential for effective communication and social development. My approach to the print reading sought to reflect these principles by combining expressive delivery with opportunities for imagination and prediction, modelling the type of interactive and creative practice that the curriculum promotes.

In contrast, my second recording, a digital retelling of *The Bear Snores On* offered a more visually stimulating, multimodal experience. The YouTube version of the book combined animated illustrations, movement and sound effects, and my narration was synchronised with the visual cues. This approach introduced an additional layer of complexity, as the timing and rhythm of the video dictated pacing. According to Rahiem (2021), digital storytelling enhances engagement and motivation by integrating multiple sensory channels, catering to varied learning preferences. Similarly, Liu (2024) suggests that digital storytelling supports literacy by enabling learners to interpret meaning across visual, auditory and textual dimensions an essential skill in the 21st century.

The digital format, however, provided less flexibility for spontaneous interaction. Whereas the printed version allowed for varied pacing, repetition and questioning, the digital story required precise synchronisation. This contrast illustrates Bruner's (1990) distinction between *enactive* and *symbolic* representation. The print storytelling experience was inactive, involving active meaning making through imagination and gesture. The digital version was symbolic knowledge was represented through moving images and sound rather than co-constructed dialogue. Although this shifted the type of engagement, it also expanded literacy learning into a new domain, the interpretation of multimodal texts. Burnett et al. (2020) emphasise that digital literacy now encompasses the ability to navigate and interpret media that combine written, visual, and auditory elements.

This experience reflects the changing nature of literacy itself. Literacy is no longer confined to decoding text but extends to understanding images, icons and sounds as carriers of meaning (Flewitt et al., 2019). By combining narration with animation, I demonstrated how technology can support and extend literacy rather than replace it.

The performance aligns with the Welsh Government's (2020) *Digital Competence Framework*, which encourages learners to become critical consumers and creative producers of digital content. Through my narration, I modelled responsible and purposeful use of technology for storytelling, emphasising expression and timing over passive media consumption.

From a pedagogical perspective, this comparison highlighted how different storytelling contexts shape the role of the educator. In traditional reading, the storyteller acts as a facilitator and guide, adapting delivery to maintain engagement. In digital storytelling, the storyteller becomes part of a mediated performance, where timing, visuals and sound collectively shape meaning. Bruner's (1983) theory of scaffolding helps explain this difference in the printed story, the teacher provides dynamic, contingent scaffolding through tone and questioning; in the digital story, the medium itself provides a structural scaffold, guiding pacing and visual emphasis. Both forms remain valuable but require different professional skills.

Emotion was conveyed differently in the two performances. In the print version, emotion was communicated through the expressive human voice, variation in pitch and rhythm, and the physical presence of the storyteller. This echoes Cremin and Flewitt's (2017) assertion that storytelling is inherently relational, drawing its emotional power from human connection. In the digital version, emotional tone was enhanced by background music, lighting, and animation. While this offered a richer sensory experience, it potentially reduced the imaginative space left to the audience. Piaget's (1952) theory helps explain this cognitive trade off, when external stimuli provide rich visual and auditory cues, internal imagery may become less active. Yet digital storytelling remains a valuable tool when combined with reflective or creative tasks, encouraging learners to reconstruct and reinterpret the story in their own way (Rahiem, 2021).

From a literacy development standpoint, both approaches offered complementary strengths. The printed story fostered phonological awareness, vocabulary acquisition, expressive speaking, and listening comprehension. The digital story supported visual literacy, technological fluency, and understanding of multimodal narrative. Marsh et al. (2017) conceptualise literacy as a continuum that includes digital communication, arguing that early exposure to multimodal storytelling

prepares learners for the complexity of modern information environments. My reflections support this view, integrating both formats provides a balanced approach that combines traditional literacy skills with emerging digital competences.

Bruner's (1996) concept of "spiral learning" further underpins this understanding. Retelling the same narrative across multiple formats deepens comprehension by reinforcing existing knowledge and extending it into new contexts. Each performance required adaptation, first through physical expression and then through digital coordination. This iterative process mirrors how learners build understanding through repetition, reflection and re-contextualisation. It demonstrates how teachers can use varied storytelling media to revisit core texts, promoting both mastery and creative thinking.

Storytelling also connects to social, emotional and cultural learning. Cremin et al. (2018) emphasise that stories nurture empathy and moral reasoning by allowing learners to explore perspectives beyond their own. The themes of *The Bear Snores On* inclusion, community and kindness resonate with the Curriculum for Wales' (2022) emphasis on wellbeing and belonging. Performing the story reinforced how literacy learning can extend beyond linguistic skills to support emotional growth and social understanding. Storytelling, in this sense, is not only a cognitive exercise but a deeply human one.

Reflecting on both storytelling experiences strengthened my appreciation of the teacher's role as performer, communicator, and mediator of meaning. The traditional reading highlighted the power of expressive language, rhythm and repetition to promote imagination and linguistic awareness. The digital version demonstrated how technology, when used intentionally, can broaden the literacy experience and engage multiple senses. Together, they illustrate the value of pedagogical flexibility and the need to integrate both print based and digital storytelling in early education. As Neumann et al. (2022) observe, today's learners encounter literacy through varied media, and effective educators must help them navigate, question, and create meaning across these modes.

In conclusion, analysing these two storytelling experiences deepened my understanding of how narrative, pedagogy, and technology intersect to support literacy development. The printed story encouraged expressive oracy, rhythm and

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imaginative engagement, reflecting Piagetian, Vygotskian and Brunerian principles of constructivist learning. The digital story enhanced engagement through multimodal representation, promoting digital literacy and visual interpretation in line with contemporary educational frameworks. Together, these experiences affirm storytelling's enduring value as both an art form and a pedagogical practice. Storytelling remains a cornerstone of learning whether through the warmth of a shared book or the dynamic energy of digital media and continues to connect communication, creativity, and understanding in education.

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