

AI Statement

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text any 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.

Storytelling is central to early childhood education because it supports the development of language, imagination, and social understanding. Within the Welsh early years context, the Curriculum for Wales (2022) identifies communication, language, and literacy as one of the key areas of learning, emphasising oracy, creativity, and cultural identity. Storytelling provides a powerful means through which these aims can be realised. It enables children to connect spoken and written language, to extend vocabulary, and to engage with rhythm and structure in meaningful contexts. Research consistently demonstrates that listening to stories enhances vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and phonological awareness (Cremin et al., 2022; Cameron-Faulkner & Noble, 2018). Story sharing also promotes emotional literacy and empathy by allowing children to explore characters' motivations and perspectives (Nicolopoulou, 2019). These benefits are evident across both traditional and digital storytelling approaches, if adults' mediate children's engagement purposefully (Marsh & Hannon, 2019). The following analysis draws on two recorded storytelling performances undertaken in alignment with Welsh early years principles: a traditional oral reading of *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* by Judith Kerr, and a digital narration of *Room on the Broom* by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler. Each performance illustrates distinct yet complementary methods for fostering language and literacy. The analysis connects observed storytelling behaviours to three theoretical perspectives widely applied in early childhood education: Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, Jean Piaget's concept of symbolic play, and Jerome Bruner's theory of narrative and representation. These frameworks are supported by recent empirical research exploring storytelling in multimodal and digital contexts. The traditional performance of *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* employed a lively reading style using expressive voice, variation in pitch and pacing, and visible props such as puppets to represent characters and actions. Expressive prosody helped children to interpret emotions and relationships within the narrative, modelling how tone conveys meaning in spoken language. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development explains how such adult modelling provides linguistic scaffolding, supporting children to internalise expressive and inferential strategies. Research by Alexander (2020) on dialogic teaching reinforces this view, showing that interactive questioning promotes deeper cognitive engagement with narrative content. During the performance, the storyteller asked,

“What will happen next?” to invite prediction and sustain attention. This open question encouraged children to practise inference and sequencing, both of which underpin later comprehension and writing skills (Cremin et al., 2022).

The use of puppets and tangible objects also supported symbolic understanding. Piaget’s (1951) theory of cognitive development identifies symbolic play as essential for linking concrete experience to abstract representation. When a puppet poured imaginary tea or enacted eating, it provided a visible cue connecting language to action. Contemporary research confirms that gestures and embodied activity enhance retention of new vocabulary and narrative order (Cameron-Faulkner et al., 2018; Glenberg & Gallese, 2019). In this performance, the material manipulation of objects assisted children in constructing a mental model of the story’s sequence—seeing the tiger drink the tea, eat the food, and leave—thus consolidating understanding of beginning, middle, and end. Embodied storytelling of this kind supports multiple domains of learning. As Flewitt et al. (2020) observe, combining movement, gesture, and spoken language helps children link sensory and linguistic information, making meaning through the whole body. The performative elements of *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* therefore contributed not only to linguistic comprehension but also to emotional engagement and memory. The consistent eye contact, variation in tone, and visible enjoyment modelled positive reading behaviours associated with a love of books—an aim reflected in the Curriculum for Wales emphasis on wellbeing and creative expression. In contrast, the digital retelling of *Room on the Broom* combined a muted animated video with live narration. This hybrid format demonstrated how digital tools can extend, rather than replace, oral storytelling. By muting the soundtrack, the narrator-maintained control over pacing and emphasis, ensuring that linguistic focus remained on the spoken words rather than the pre-recorded audio. Bruner (1986) proposed that narrative provides a structure for organising human experience, and that meaning is negotiated through shared storytelling acts. In this performance, the narrator’s live voice created that shared social frame within a multimodal environment. Research into digital storytelling has shown that when adults guide attention and use strategic pauses, screen-based media can foster vocabulary growth and comprehension like that achieved with print stories (Kucirkova, 2019; Neumann, 2022). At one point, the storyteller paused the animation and asked, “What do you think will happen next?”—a technique consistent with dialogic approaches recommended by Flewitt et al.

(2020). Such pauses give children time to process narrative cues and articulate predictions, strengthening inferential reasoning and engagement. The combination of visual animation and live oral narration reflects Bruner's (1986) model of representation: enactive (actions), iconic (images), and symbolic (language). The narrator bridged these modes by linking the movement on screen to verbal explanation, enabling children to construct meaning across modalities. The digital performance also reflected current Welsh policy aims to integrate digital competence across learning areas. Within the Curriculum for Wales (2022), digital competence is described as essential for enabling children to communicate, create and collaborate. By presenting *Room on the Broom* through muted video with live narration, the storyteller modelled responsible and creative digital use while maintaining the relational and linguistic focus of oral storytelling. Marsh (2021) notes that children's digital literacy develops most effectively when adults mediate digital texts, encouraging discussion and reflection rather than passive viewing. The deliberate control of sound and the incorporation of questioning transformed what could have been a purely visual experience into an interactive learning encounter. Comparing the two performances highlights both continuity and adaptation within storytelling practice. The traditional version of *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* foregrounded prosody, gesture and material props that supported oracy, vocabulary and emotional literacy. The digital version of *Room on the Broom* emphasised multimodal comprehension, enabling children to connect spoken narration with visual sequencing and rhyme. Despite differences in format, both relied on adult mediation—through tone, pacing, and questioning—to sustain engagement and comprehension. Empirical studies consistently report that when educators scaffold both print and digital storytelling, children achieve comparable gains in vocabulary and understanding (Cremin et al., 2022; Flewitt et al., 2020; Neumann, 2022). The decisive factor is not the medium but the quality of adult–child interaction. Each of the three theorists offers a complementary perspective on the observed behaviours. Vygotsky's emphasis on social mediation explains why expressive reading and questioning in the traditional performance supported linguistic development: the adult voice modelled strategies that children internalise within their zone of proximal development. Piaget's concept of symbolic play clarifies the cognitive value of using puppets and props; through substitution and pretend action, children rehearse representational thought. Bruner's theory of narrative representation provides a

framework for understanding how the digital performance connected action, image and language, enabling children to form cohesive story schemas. Contemporary research in multimodal learning (Kucirkova, 2019; Marsh, 2021) extends these ideas, showing that digital storytelling remains most effective when rooted in these classic theoretical foundations. The combined evidence from theory and research suggests that storytelling continues to be one of the most versatile pedagogical tools in early education. In Wales, where early years pedagogy values play, imagination and oracy, storytelling aligns closely with national priorities for developing communication and literacy. When adults deliver stories with expressive language, controlled pacing and interactive questioning, they provide the scaffolding necessary for both cognitive and emotional growth. Moreover, integrating digital tools within storytelling—while maintaining a strong narrative focus—mirrors the bilingual and multimodal literacy aims of the Curriculum for Wales. Critically, not all studies report identical outcomes. Some researchers argue that digital stories risk over-stimulating children or reducing opportunities for open discussion if not carefully mediated (Flewitt et al., 2020). Others note that traditional storytelling requires time and training to deliver effectively (Cremin et al., 2022). Nonetheless, across both forms, the consensus remains that adult interaction, expressive delivery and opportunities for prediction and reflection are decisive factors in literacy development. The storyteller's use of voice, gesture, questioning and technological control in the two performances collectively illustrates evidence-informed practice grounded in these principles. Overall, the literature reviewed demonstrates that storytelling—traditional and digital alike—promotes the intertwined development of language, imagination and literacy. Foundational theories from Vygotsky, Piaget and Bruner continue to provide explanatory depth for observed behaviours, while recent empirical research in the UK and internationally situates these ideas within twenty-first-century pedagogical contexts. For practitioners and students working within the Welsh early years framework, the integration of expressive oral storytelling with reflective use of digital media offers a powerful, inclusive approach to communication and literacy learning.

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