



THE 63RD BOLOGNA CHILDREN'S BOOK FAIR

Digital storytelling for children: the results of the first international Observatory Report, organised by Bologna Children's Book Fair and Associazione Literacy Italia

The Bologna Children's Book Fair and Literacy Italia, in collaboration with Norla (Norwegian Literature Abroad) and with the support of ITA – Italian Trade Agency and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), are promoting the first edition of the **Digital Narratives Observatory** as part of the 63rd edition of the fair, with the aim of observing and mapping the features of new forms of digital storytelling, fostering dialogue between research, publishing and educational practice, and providing guidance tools and evaluation criteria for those who create, publish, disseminate and teach stories in an increasingly digital context.

Two sessions were held at the fair on Wednesday 15 April to explore the topic in greater detail and to present the first **Observatory Report**. In attendance were **Tiziana Mascia** (Associazione Literacy Italia, Italy), **Jennifer Rowsell** (University of Sheffield, United Kingdom), **Assunta Di Febo** (Associazione Literacy Italia, Italy), **Barbara Vanin** (VEZ Rete Biblioteche Venezia, Italy), **Scott Rettberg** (University of Bergen, Centre for Digital Narrative, Norway), **Kate Pullinger** (writer, Canada/United Kingdom), **Davide Morosinotto** (writer, Italy), **Federica de Quagliatti** (Senior Journal Specialist at Frontiers for Young Minds, Switzerland), **Pier Cesare Rivoltella** (University of Bologna, Italy).

Whilst it appears to be the case that children's enjoyment of reading is declining worldwide, another reality is emerging alongside this trend: children today are coming into contact with stories through a variety of formats (audiobooks, interactive stories, narrative video games and picture books). As a result, the reading ecosystem is not shrinking: it is **changing shape**.

The Observatory was therefore conceived to respond to a shared question – how can we observe, understand and guide this transformation? – and proposes a **change in perspective**: whilst discussions of digital narratives tend to concentrate on the medium, the **Observatory is shifting the focus onto the reader**.

Drawing on international literature and an analysis of the BolognaRagazzi CrossMedia Awards archive, the Report identifies four modes of digital storytelling – Media-Enhanced Reading, Traversing, Inhabiting and Co-Creating – which differ in the degree of agency offered to the reader, ranging from someone who simply receives the story to someone who co-creates it with the author. This space represents an opportunity for publishers wishing to position themselves in an area that is currently under-explored, leading to an **integrated system of narrative worlds in which every element contributes to moving the story forward**.

THE SURVEY

Between February and March 2026, the Observatory conducted a **survey of exhibitors** at the Bologna Children's Book Fair. 121 children's book publishers took part (62.8% from Europe, 11.6% from Latin America, 11.6% from Asia, 7.4% from North America, with contributions also from other areas), offering an informative snapshot of how the industry is positioning itself: not a sector resisting change, but one seeking new paths.





An industry in transition. 37% of publishers say they have already trialled experiments or pilot projects in the field of digital storytelling, 19% describe digital storytelling as a strategic direction for their catalogue, 22% still consider it to be outside the core of their offer. Publishers are not divided into those in favour of and those against digital: they are simply moving at different speeds.

Where activity is concentrated. Formats closest to the book are driving digital publishing activity: 46% of publishers are active or are considering investing in audio (audiobooks, podcasts, enhanced audio), 45% in enhanced e-books and reading apps. More experimental formats, such immersive stories and AI-based projects, remain below 15%.

The barriers. On the economic and strategic front, 47.1% cite uncertainty regarding actual demand and 43.8% cite production costs that are still too high. On the cultural front, 33.9% express ethical concerns regarding artificial intelligence and children's data, around 30% fear that digital formats may devalue books, and 24.8% express doubts about literary quality in the new formats.

What publishers are requesting. 46% are asking for data and research on digital reading habits, 45% for guidelines on which formats are best suited to their catalogue, 42% for low-risk opportunities to experiment, and 41% for practical support on the financial viability of projects.

A look to the future. Over the next three to five years, 61% of publishers expect digital to play an active role in their market: 48% anticipate that books and digital will complement each other (each with their own readerships), whilst 13% foresee new hybrid forms in which print and digital are integrated. On the other hand, 23% believe that the printed book will remain dominant and 5% predict that digital will become the main format for the younger generations. What has emerged is a vision of coexistence rather than integration: each format with its own space, with still little consideration of how the different formats can work together as parts of a single narrative experience.

The full Report can be downloaded from the Bologna Children's Book Fair website:

https://www.bolognachildrenbookfair.com/media/libro/2026/osservatorio%20digitale/DNO_Report_2026_Literacy_Italia_e_BCBF.pdf

Bologna, 15 April 2026

www.bolognachildrenbookfair.com

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TOGETHER WE
ARE BETTER
SHARING,
CARING,
INSPIRING:
THE MANY FACES
OF CHILDREN'S
CONTENT

