

12 Using PowerPoint in Shared Story Reading

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1 INTRODUCTION

Many claims have been made about the value of technology in language learning; in particular, PowerPoint, it has been argued, can enhance language learners' motivation and understanding (Schcolnik & Kol, 1999; Fisher, 2003; Conner & Go, 2000). The purpose of this study is to examine such claims in the context of shared story reading in Grade 6 General Education classes in Oman. In particular, I was interested in finding out what effect teaching stories through PowerPoint, compared to the use of a big book, would have on my learners' understanding and motivation.

2 SHARED READING IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

2.1 PowerPoint

PowerPoint, as defined by Schcolnik & Kol (1999: 1), "is a computer tool for creating on-screen multimedia presentations or overhead transparencies". It allows coloured text, images, animation, video and sounds to be combined and presented to learners, either on computer screens or using a projector with a larger screen for the whole class. PowerPoint can be used to support all aspects of learning English and in this study my particular focus is shared story reading.

2.2 Benefits of Stories

Stories are very important in teaching English to young learners because they provide interest and enjoyment in addition to language input. Scott (1985, in Aiex, 1988), Stoye (n.d) and Lelmini (n.d) suggest a number of benefits of using stories. They can introduce children to a range of experiences, provide models of story patterns, themes and characters, help them in their own oral language and thinking, encourage a sense of humour, help them put their own worlds in perspective, and increase knowledge and understanding of other cultures. Stories also develop children's ability to link English with other subjects such as cultural and social studies.

2.3 Shared Reading

Shared reading is an interactive reading experience that occurs when learners join in fluent, repeated choral reading of a big book or other enlarged text as guided by a teacher or other experienced reader (see the Balanced Literacy website). In this study I compared the use of PowerPoint and big books as strategies for engaging learners in shared reading. In PowerPoint, the story is presented through multimedia slides created on a computer; big books are enlarged versions of printed stories which are big enough for the teacher to hold and for the learners to see and follow while the story is being told.

2.4 Assessing Comprehension and Motivation

In this study I assessed learners' comprehension and motivation after shared reading using both PowerPoint and a big book. I briefly discuss the two areas I assessed below.

2.4.1 Assessing Reading Comprehension

Mohamad (1999) and Peggy (1990) suggest that, in assessing reading, three levels of comprehension should be considered: literal, referential and critical. Literal comprehension focuses on the surface meaning of the texts; referential comprehension refers to learners' ability to understand indirect information in a text; critical reading comprehension involves a deeper and more personal response to a text. Peggy (1990) also advises teachers to consider using a range of assessment strategies rather than relying solely on multiple-choice questions.

2.4.2 Assessing Motivation

Motivation is difficult to measure because it is made up of a number of elements. Crookes & Schmidt (1991) and Nunan (1989) suggest that elements such as level of interest, eagerness, persistence, attention, concentration, enjoyment, challenge and participation are all indicators of motivation. My experience as a teacher suggests that learners' level of involvement, willingness to predict, reaction to stories, and use of imagination are also indicators of motivation during story telling. All these elements influenced the design of the instrument I used to assess learners' motivation in this study.

3 METHOD

3.1 Research Questions

The aim of the study was to examine learners' motivation during and reading comprehension after shared story reading using PowerPoint. The specific research questions I investigated were:

1. To what extent are learners motivated during the PowerPoint shared story reading lessons?
2. How do learners perform on reading comprehension tests following PowerPoint shared story reading?

3. How do my learners feel about the use of PowerPoint in shared story reading?

3.2 Context

I conducted this study with two Grade 6 General Education English classes. Each class had 32 learners who were mostly 12 years of age. They were in their third year of learning English and their ability to read short texts or stories was fairly good. Some were familiar with computers and others had some experience of shared reading using big books.

The coursebook used with these learners was *Our World Through English (OWTE) 6B*. For this study I chose two narrative short stories from this textbook. The stories were 'A Desert Rescue: Issa and Salim's Story' and 'Jamal and Abdullah at the Beach'. The stories contained similar structures and vocabulary, focusing in particular on regular and irregular simple past verb forms.

In teaching these stories using PowerPoint and big books, I first prepared the visuals needed for each strategy (i.e. the actual PowerPoint slides and big books). During the lessons, the learners were asked to sit on the floor or a mat facing the big book or PowerPoint screen. I sat alongside the text facing the learners and used a pointer to model left to right movements as I read the text aloud. The learners followed me and were invited to join in when I read the stories a second time.

3.3 Data Collection

Three sets of data were collected for this study, using observation, reading comprehension tests, and a questionnaire.

3.3.1 Observation

I taught each of the two stories described above to both classes who took part in the study. I thus taught four lessons in total, and each class was taught one story using PowerPoint and one using a big book. To assess learners' motivation during the lessons, I designed an observation sheet (see the Appendix) which included some of the elements of motivation discussed earlier. The lessons were observed by colleagues. I asked them to observe the class during the story reading, then to complete the observation sheet at the end. There was also space on the sheet for them to write any additional comments.

3.3.2 Reading Comprehension Tests

After each story, learners completed a comprehension test (there was a different test for each story, but the same test was used for both the PowerPoint and big book version of each story). The tests consisted of ten items in which learners had to complete a sentence with information from the story. Examples of items are "Issa and Salim visited the suq in _____" and "Jamal and Abdullah fished from some _____". The learners were familiar with these types of questions and were given 20 minutes to complete the tests. I wanted learners to write answers which were acceptable, readable and understandable. I did not penalize spelling as my focus was not on accuracy.

3.3.3 Questionnaire

All learners in both classes completed a questionnaire (see Findings below). This was administered in Arabic and contained 12 closed questions which asked the learners for their views about the PowerPoint and big book lessons. There was also one open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire which asked the learners which method of shared story reading they preferred and why.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Observations

Observers' ratings on the observation sheet indicated that learners were more motivated during the PowerPoint lessons. During both PowerPoint lessons, learners' levels of interest and enjoyment were rated as very high, as was their willingness to predict, involvement and use of imagination. Observers' ratings of these characteristics during the big book lessons were not as high.

In their further comments, observers of the PowerPoint lessons noted that the learners were highly motivated; learners during the big book lessons were in contrast described as slightly motivated. One observer's comments on the PowerPoint lessons said that "All of the pupils were interested", while one observer of the big book lessons said that "most pupils feel interested". I am not suggesting that learners were not motivated during the big book lesson; observers' ratings and comments, though, indicated that the learners were more motivated during the PowerPoint lesson.

4.2 Reading Comprehension Tests

Sixty-four learners (in two classes) completed two reading comprehension tests after one PowerPoint and one big book story respectively. Table 1 shows the average scores (out of 10) on each test.

Table 1: Average scores on comprehension tests

	Class 1	Class 2
PowerPoint	4	3.1
Big Book	1.7	1.7

These results show that, while the average mark on all tests was low, the scores for the tests after both PowerPoint stories were higher than those for the big books.

4.3 Questionnaires

Table 2 presents the results of the questionnaires, which 64 learners completed. Fifty-seven learners (89%) said they liked PowerPoint. Forty-one learners (64%) said they liked reading stories with PowerPoint while 36 (56%) said they liked big books. Eighteen learners said they did not like PowerPoint compared to 16 for the big books. Thirty-five learners said they would prefer PowerPoint to a book, while 27 felt their teachers should use PowerPoint in class. On the basis of these figures, I

conclude that learners had positive views about the use of PowerPoint in the classroom, although it must be acknowledged that big books were also popular.

Table 2: Questionnaire responses by 64 learners

No.	Question	Yes	No	Unsure
1	Do you like PowerPoint?	57	3	4
2	Do you like reading stories with PowerPoint?	41	18	5
3	Do you like reading stories with big books?	36	16	12
4	Does the large screen help you understand the stories?	42	7	15
5	Do you like reading on the computer in the computer room?	45	9	10
6	Do you like reading in the classroom?	31	20	13
7	Do you think PowerPoint helps you to improve your reading comprehension skill?	39	10	15
8	Do you think PowerPoint helps you to read better English?	40	10	14
9	Do you think pictures can help you learn English better?	40	15	9
10	Do you use PowerPoint at home?	22	34	8
11	Would you prefer to use PowerPoint to read English rather than using a book?	35	14	15
12	Should your teachers use PowerPoint in class to teach you English?	27	14	23

The above questionnaires did not ask learners to say which method they preferred most. The open-ended question, though, did, and here a clear preference for PowerPoint shared story reading emerged. Of the 54 learners who answered this question, 42 said they preferred PowerPoint, 11 chose big books, while one wrote that he liked both equally. Some comments about PowerPoint were that it “helped me to read and understand English” and that it “helped to see the screen clearly and to increase the reading ability”. One learner who preferred the big book wrote that the “big book helped to read not to use the computer”.

5 DISCUSSION

I will now consider the findings of this study by referring back to my research questions. The first question considered the extent to which learners were motivated during the PowerPoint shared story lessons. The answer to this question is that they were, and that the levels of motivation observed were higher than those for the big book lessons. This does not imply that motivation during the big book lessons was low, but does support the view mentioned earlier that PowerPoint can motivate language learners.

The second question asked about the learners’ performance on reading comprehension tests after the PowerPoint lessons. The findings here were clear;

both classes did better on the test after the PowerPoint lesson than after the big book lesson. It must be noted, though, that in both cases the average scores were quite low.

The third question considered how the learners felt about the use of PowerPoint in shared story reading. A number of responses on the learners' questionnaire indicated that they had positive views about this way of presenting stories. Big books were also popular though, although when learners were asked to say which they preferred most, there was a clear preference for PowerPoint.

5.1 Limitations

My goal here was not to argue that big books are not useful for presenting stories but that PowerPoint can also be productively used. While my findings confirm this, there are some limitations which must be noted. Firstly, learners' positive responses to PowerPoint may have been influenced by its novelty rather than by its effectiveness as a language learning tool. To address this limitation, more lessons using PowerPoint over a period of time would need to be studied. Secondly, there is also a danger that my enthusiasm for PowerPoint may have influenced the results here; for example, unconsciously I may have presented the story more enthusiastically during the PowerPoint lessons; some learners may have also noticed my feelings about PowerPoint and tried to please me with their questionnaire responses.

6 CONCLUSION

This study has provided evidence that shared story reading through PowerPoint can be usefully added to English teachers' instructional repertoires. It would not be practical for me to suggest that all teachers should use PowerPoint regularly, as constraints created by limited resources and time would not make this feasible. However, what I would suggest is, where the appropriate equipment is available, that teachers consider integrating PowerPoint into their syllabus, and seeking ways of using it to present stories to learners. My learners reacted positively to this strategy and their reading comprehension following PowerPoint lessons was, on the lessons compared here, better than it was on big book lessons. These findings have encouraged me to continue exploring ways of integrating PowerPoint into my work as an English language teacher.

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APPENDIX: OBSERVATION SHEET - MOTIVATON

Instructions

1. This sheet is for observation of the class as a whole, not individual pupils.
2. Complete this sheet when the task is drawing to a close.
3. Tick (✓) ONE box for each statement.
4. Add final comments at the bottom of the sheet if you wish.

	Very high	High	Average	Low	Very low
Pupils are interested during the shared reading.					
Pupils concentrate on the shared reading.					
Pupils are involved in the shared reading.					
Pupils predict what will happen next.					
Pupils react to the story events.					
Pupils use their imagination during the shared reading.					
Pupils enjoy reading the story aloud together.					
Pupils appear to like the way the story was read.					

Comments:
