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# Talking books

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plugged in

# TALKING BOOKS



What are talking books? They are multi-media literacy tools. They are digital tools that combine the pictures and print text of storybooks with a recorded voice. Talking books are exemplary resources for young children in early childhood contexts.

By Dr. Shelley Kinash

The author experienced one of her favourite examples of the use of talking books at a primary school. Each year five student was partnered with a year one student. Together, the pairs selected a favourite storybook. The year five student produced the talking book for the year one student, who enjoyed and used it as a literacy tool.

There are numerous benefits of talking books for everyone involved.

1. The child producing the talking book:
  - Practises choice and decision making
  - Builds vocabulary
  - Reinforces reading skills
  - Develops skills in reading aloud, including pacing, volume and expressiveness
  - Scaffolds empathy for younger learners
  - Acknowledges growth and development, explicitly recognizing advances from the stage of the receiving child
  - Experiences pride of production and self-efficacy
  - Establishes skills in ICT (information and communications technology)
  - Generates competence in the digital age
  - Contributes to a generation of learning resources
  - Celebrates learning as fun
2. The child receiving the talking book:
  - Practices choice and decision making
  - Builds vocabulary

- Initiates reading skills
  - Develops skills in reading along, including pacing, volume and expressiveness
  - Secures an older buddy in the schoolyard
  - Has a role model to inspire growth and development (research shows that self-efficacy is promoted when children experience modelling from other children rather than adults)
  - Fosters a relationship with, and thus empathy for, older learners
  - Experiences pride of ownership and the glow of gift receiving
  - Establishes skills in the use of ICT tools
  - Generates competence in the digital age
  - Celebrates learning as fun
3. The teachers:
    - Document explicit learning outcomes, promoting measurable growth and development over time
    - Integrate skill development into enjoyable, cross-curricular materials
    - Facilitate student-driven learning
    - Foster cooperation and a positive school dynamic
    - Establish skills in ICT
    - Generate competence in the digital age
    - Build a library of literacy resources
    - Celebrate learning as fun

#### A Step-by-Step Guide to Producing a Digital Book

1. Decide whether the children will be working in partners or by themselves. Will the older children be producing talking books for the younger children? Will the children be producing books for themselves?
2. If partnering older and younger children, consider organizing the pairs according to reading ability. For example, high-level readers from the upper grade will produce talking books for the high-level readers in the lower grade. Struggling readers in the upper grade will develop self-efficacy through producing an early reader for an emergent reader in the younger grade.
3. If working with pairs, facilitate book sharing sessions prior to beginning work on the talking book. The older and the younger students will each bring a book(s) to read to one another and share their favourite elements of the books. Does the student

like the pictures? The words? The humour? The rhythm?

4. Support the children to choose appropriate books. The Steve Parish Kids Story Books, such as Tree-Frog Tangles and Wombat's Secret are positive choices. The stories are written by Rebecca Johnson and the photos are by Steve Parish. There are over thirty books in the series.

#### These books work well for many reasons:

- a. the photographs are bright, interesting and compelling
  - b. the stories are charming and engaging
  - c. the plots are simple and active
  - d. the vocabulary is appropriate for young children, and yet promotes development
  - e. the books are ecologically oriented, scaffolding respect and active protection of the environment
  - f. the subject matter is Australian animals, bridging the children's interest
  - g. the stories are grammatically correct
  - h. the stories are written using Queensland script, so that children are experiencing appropriate print modelling
  - i. the stories are long enough to promote development and yet short enough to sustain interest in the digital production
  - j. there are approximately ten to twenty words per page, which is an appropriate developmental quantity
  - k. the sentences have full stops on the pages open to the children. The reader does not need to remember the initial words in turning the page to the latter part of the sentence
5. Supply digital cameras for the producing child to photograph each page, including the front cover and final author's note.
  6. Support the child to take a digital photo of each page of the book.
 

Prior to taking the photos, provide a photography tutorial.

#### The child should ensure that:

- a. there is plenty of light on the book
- b. there are no distracting shadows
- c. the pages are lying flat
- d. there is no clutter beneath the book in case the book's dimensions do not fill the entire camera frame

e. the child knows how to zoom so that the photo frame is maximal size without cutting off any of the picture

7. Connect the camera to a computer using the USB (universal serial bus) cord. Store the photographs in a file that is easy to access and is on a network for security. It is frustrating for children to be unable to find their photographs when they return to their project and/or have lost photographs that were not properly saved.

8. Select a software program with which to produce the talking book. Microsoft Office PowerPoint is recommended for four reasons:

- a. it is almost universally installed on school computers
- b. it is intuitive and user-friendly
- c. it is stable and seldom crashes
- d. it has creative features that work well for talking books, including auditory capabilities

This step-by-step guide will proceed on the assumption that the children are using PowerPoint to produce their talking books.

9. Open PowerPoint. Name and save the document. For example, the name might be the school name, the producing student's last name and the title of the story.

10. Open a slide:

- a. click on Insert – New Slide
- b. click on Content Layouts – Blank (on the right-hand side of the page)
- c. click on Insert – Picture – From File (double click on the digital photo of the front cover of the book)

The digital photo will appear on the first page of the PowerPoint document.

d. use the corner arrows to enlarge or decrease the photo so that it maximally fills the page. (Clicking on the corner arrows will maintain the proper dimensions, whereas clicking on the top, bottom, or sides will not)

e. click on Save

11. Repeat for each digital photograph/page of the storybook.

12. Ensure that the child has a functioning microphone to plug into the computer and a quiet, uninterrupted setting in which to record.

For each page of the PowerPoint presentation, click on Slide Show – Record Narration. Follow the provided instructions.

13. Preview the pages to ensure that each recording is functioning properly.

14. Add transition to the slide show:

- a. click on Slide Show – Slide Transition
- b. choose a transition. For example, Cover Left Down works effectively for talking books

15. Modify transition:

- a. select Slow
- b. select Sound. Chime works nicely for talking books
- c. select Advance Slide – Automatically After (depends on the reading speed of child)

16. Children might also want to experiment with animation schemes and backgrounds. Remind children to save.

17. Save and burn onto CDROM and/or DVD.

18. To use the talking book, click on View Slide.

There are numerous benefits of talking books for everyone involved – they build vocabulary, establish ICT skills and celebrate learning as fun.

19. Ensure the receiving child has a quiet, uninterrupted place to read the digital book with headphones.

Remember to keep a copy for your library! Enjoy! ■

*Dr. Shelley Kinash is an Academic in Higher Education Teaching and Learning Services at Bond University. She was previously employed in the Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland and in Educational Technology at the University of Calgary in Canada. Dr. Kinash passionately grounds her teaching and learning in an inquiry-based pedagogical stance through infused technologies. Dr. Kinash can be contacted via email [skinash@bond.edu.au](mailto:skinash@bond.edu.au)*

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