

Understanding technology-enhanced storybooks and their roles in teaching and learning: An investigation of electronic storybooks in education

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Abstract

The benefit of using stories--and specifically storybooks--in education has been well documented in the research literature. However, over the past few years, there have been dramatic changes in their look and feel. Many of the recent changes in the presentation and delivery of stories have been made possible by emerging technologies. In this paper, we investigate and characterize features of storybooks in terms of electronic media. Specifically, we define four different types of electronic storybooks (ES) and identify their potential roles in education. We argue that stories are represented and integrated through technology with less constraint on form and the combination can lead to a more multi-literate approach to teaching and learning. We end with a call for research to identify benefits of each specific type of ES.

Introduction to technology-enhanced storybooks

Stories have been used to educate since the beginning of time. They allow us to explicate (Bruner, 1990), interpret (Gudmundsdottir, 1995), organize and remember (Bruner, 1990; Schank, 1999). And recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in a narrative approach to teaching and learning (McEwan & Egan, 1995; Heath, 1994). McEwan and Egan (1995) argue that stories provide opportunities to embark on authentic explorations of experience from various perspectives. Schank (1999) suggests that relating and listening to stories is the most important element in learning. Bruner (1990) and others contend that the sharing of stories is so important that we must possess some kind of narrative intelligence that allows us to formulate or follow a story (Randal, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1988).

In these arguments, stories have been recognized as being an important part of cognition (thinking, explaining, understanding and remembering). Stories are seen as the most natural and powerful form of storing and describing experiential knowledge. Moreover, Jonassen (2002) argues that stories are perhaps the most generic and applicable forms of learning support for problem solving. He believes that stories elicited from skilled problem solvers, indexed for the lessons they have to teach, and made available to learners in the form of case libraries can support a broader range of problem solving than any other strategy or tactic (Jonassen, 2002).

However, with the advent of extensive technology integration in our society and in our schools, the way in which a story can be presented is dramatically changing. 'Electronic storybooks' are becoming prevalent in education as one way to teach students about content, literary features such as narrative structure, and even technology itself (Lehrer, Erickson & Connel, 1994; Downes & Fatouros, 1995; Leu & Kinzer, 2000; Eagleton & Hamilton, 2001). These electronic storybooks take traditional oral or print stories, and add graphics, sound, animation, and video to create new interactive storybooks. They enable the invention of new delivery methods and creative formats for stories, reaching beyond oral speech, and handwritten prose. They also provoke plays on the ways that oral or written stories tell events for characters who move among their settings (Lorien, J.S. & Lorien, A., 2001). Finally, they allow students to use a variety of technological and information resources to gather, synthesize information, and create and communicate knowledge

(NCTE/IRA 2001) around local, state, and national standards.

University researchers, educational institutions, and software companies are following an interest in electronic stories by incorporating storybooks, interaction, and virtual reality structures in the development of educational technologies for teaching and learning (Karraker, 1996). For example, [Papert's Epistemology and Learning](#) (Papert, 2001) highlights some of these concepts in the form of constructionism; [Human Interface Technology Laboratory](#) (HITL) researchers at the University of Washington address educational issues in virtual reality (HITL 2001); the [Virtual Theater](#) at Stanford University explores the areas of narrative, characters, agents and coherent scenario structures related to children's learning development (Education index, 2001); finally, the text-based virtual communities of MUDs (Multi-User Dungeon) and MOOs (MUD Object-Oriented) find users collaborating to create stories about their virtual lives and their virtual worlds (MUDS, MOO, etc., for Education, 2001).

Electronic storybooks are also becoming increasingly important in developing children's literacy abilities. This increase in use has been supplemented by research studies that have provided evidence of positive learning outcomes in utilizing ESs for literacy acquisition. Matthew (1996) found that comprehension was higher for pairs of third-grade children who used electronic storybooks than for those who used the traditional print versions of the same story. Johnston (1995) indicated that kindergartners significantly increased their verbal abilities when using hypermedia storybooks. Glasgow (1997) found that CD-ROM storybooks motivated students to read. Talley (1994) studied 73 Head Start children and determined it was useful to integrate CD-ROM storybooks in the preschool classroom to augment emergent literacy instruction. In sum, electronic storybooks have demonstrated a significant impact on teaching and learning.

Electronic storybooks and multiple literacies

This significant impact is an important reason to consider the use of ESs in educational settings. However, recent research in emergent literacy has also suggested another important reason to use electronic storybooks - that of the existence and need for multiple literacies.

Emergent literacy suggests children develop literacy from birth. Children were studied in their natural settings and various activities were evaluated for their impact on literacy learning (Smith, 2001). Researchers recognized that emergent literacy included not only reading and writing, but also various other domains in which literate behaviors could be observed (Purcell-Gates, 1996; Teale, 1986; Labbo, 1996; Hollingsworth and Gallego, 1996). They suggested that the conception of literacy as reading and writing of printed materials should expand to include things like oral traditions, stories, music, mathematics, visual images, movement, and dance (Crawford, 1995; Noll, 1995). Many researchers, drawing on this perspective, began to argue that there was not one specific path to literacy, but rather multiple, broader notions of what is meant to be literate (Kantor, Miller, & Fernie, 1992; Labbo, 1996). Theorists also began to argue for the inclusion of multimedia and computer-based text in definitions of 'multiple literacies'. Kellner (1998) theorized about the importance of multiple literacies and argued that they should include both traditional print literacy and literacies to engage new technologies. His conception of multiple literacy included critical media literacy, print literacy, computer literacy, cultural literacy, social literacy and ecoliteracy.

The New London Group (1996) also drew on technology in extending the idea of multiple literacies in generating new pedagogies. They indicated that students need

opportunities for various discourses with a variety of texts to reach their literate potential and that included access to multimedia technologies.

In sum, electronic storybooks provide an opportunity for learners to become familiar with stories in a new format. Traditional literacy instruction (i.e. the story format) now has the possibility to be taught within a new literacy (multimedia and technology-based literacy). However, electronic storybooks also provide opportunities to explore even more literacies (music, movement, visual, etc.), thus dually supporting notions of multiple literacies. The ES is now seen as an important way to integrate concepts of learning theories and curriculum objectives into a computer-based setting, as well as important tool in extending efforts towards multi-literate environments.

Characteristics of today's ESs

In light of the research on technology integration in literacy acquisition, as well as the theoretical work on multiple literacies, ESs can be seen as valuable tools in educational settings. However, as highlighted above, there are various applications of ESs based on both theory and practice (Roussos, 1996). In other words, there is not one simple definition of what makes an ES. At one end of the scale are technologies with simple levels of interaction such as cartoon videos with animation and sound effects (see [Folk legends of Japan](#), 2002). At the other are the more advanced products that simulate the human experience of storytelling. An example of these more elaborate models is Laurel's Interactive Fantasy (Laurel, 1991), where users compose narrative, characters, and plot structure. The software requires the user's control and manipulation to form the plot, content, and outcome of the story.

As highlighted briefly here and in the research to be explored in this article, ESs come in diverse formats. They vary according to the quality of presentation and design, the educational value, ease of use, play life, medium of delivery, and other factors of importance to educators and parents. Thus, if we are to explore the potential benefits of electronic storybooks in education, we must begin with an examination of the various types that are created, purchased, and used in homes and schools. This will help us refine our research questions as we begin to understand that joining all categories of electronic storybooks is a limited and potentially dangerous grouping. We need to examine what is unique and beneficial about each type of storybook experience. We need to understand how various combinations of graphics, sounds, music, motion, video, hyperlinks, and text facilitate literacy (and other kinds of) development.

In the remainder of this paper, we describe four categories of ESs related to their various features and characteristics, from simple to complex. These categories include: interactive toys and games, educational CD-ROMs, Web-based storybooks, and story-sharing tools. This is an important first step in clarifying the use and application of the various programs for teaching and learning. In describing each category, we highlight the characteristics and examples of the ES, explore research that has been completed based on that specific definition, and draw attention to strategies used for teaching and learning with that tool (Table 1 summarizes this work).

Interactive toys and games

The first category of ESs we would like to introduce and define is called "interactive toys and games". It may seem strange to refer to a toy or game when thinking in terms of a traditional storybook. However, this category includes games and toys that tell children stories or those that help develop children's storying and story-sharing abilities when applied to a learning situation. We define this category first,

as it perhaps is the one that has been around the longest. This type of ES began as toys that acted as toys first and as an electronic medium second. For instance, in 1983, a bear called "Teddy Ruxpin"[™] was produced. Children could hold or play with the teddy bear in much the same way they would with other dolls. However, Teddy was also animated and had a tape player inside of him. Thus, the bear would 'tell' a story to children, complete with moving mouth and body parts.

More recently, these toys have taken on a life of their own. They are developed and marketed as interactive learning toys. They continue to take the shape of dolls, but also can be seen as shopping carts, handheld devices, books, magazines, and pets. Examples include the [LeapFrog](#)[™] learning products, [Lego Mindstorms](#)[™], [Furby](#)[™], and [Neurosmith's MusicBlocks](#)[™]. New examples include work that is being undertaken related to robots and human interaction (see the [Stanford Robotics Laboratory](#)).

The common thread between these toys is an electronic device that activates a previously passive object in order to motivate children to write, edit, collaborate, and share their stories or activities (Glos & Cassell, 1997). Although many of these toys now allow access to the Internet to "update" their software or their content, the focus is on the stand-alone, mobile, and hand-held nature of the tools. These toys and interactive games are successful in part because of their ability to foster interest and motivation through the use of electronic media.

Interactive toys and games are designed to develop children's real-life skills including the abilities of creating storybooks. Some of the main characteristics of this category include: game-access learning, interaction between computational artifacts and the user, non-linear user control, feedback-based programs, human experience in real life, closed environments, real-world simulations, and recording and storage capability.

Specific research results are hard to reference due to the commercial nature of many of these products. However, researchers have suggested that these interactive toys can change the way children think and behave (Fogg, in press). In addition, research suggests that interactive games and toys can be important to a child's education, but positive results have been found when used in conjunction with human contact (Oravec, 2001).

Teaching with interactive learning toys can be quite easy for teachers at any grade level due to businesses' recent understanding of the importance of pedagogy in design. Thus, many products already come with lesson plans, or they are designed to address specific pedagogical issues or concerns. For instance, some of [LeapFrog's](#)[™] products relate to helping children learn how to tell stories. Many of these products come with their own websites. And still other websites are created by interested parents or teachers who want to share instructional approaches. The relative ease of use, availability, cost, and children's interest make interactive toys and games an important tool for a narrative pedagogy.

Future research in this area needs to draw on a continued interest in robotics and artificial intelligence. However, specifically related to narrative, research should also focus on the degree to which mobile and handheld interfaces impact the story creativity, narrative development, and social interaction of children using these tools.

Educational CD-ROM

A second type of ES comes in the form of educational CD-ROMs. Educational CD-ROMs are self-contained ES, existing exclusively on CDs. These ESs integrate content

with animations, music, sound, slide shows, movies, audio-video clips, hypertext, graphics, and hypermedia. However, instead of using hyperlinks to the Internet's resources, the educational CD exists in a closed environment, which involves the learner in the simulated situation entirely on the CD. The educational CD is a more object-oriented ES focused on knowledge delivery or training in some specified topic.

An example of an Educational CD-ROM is the CD-ROM talking book. Talking books are electronic versions of stories that integrate animations, music, sound, and other digital media in order to bring support to the story line. As the CD-ROM talking book share the story with children, it models fluent reading and highlights the text. Typically, CD-ROM talking books are also interactive. Users can select words for pronunciation and have passages re-read, as they view animations and receive visual or auditory feedback (Labbo, 2000). [Broderbund](#) distributes a series of CD-ROM talking books called the Living Book series. The collection includes CD-ROM talking books based on Dr. Seuss's ABC, Green Eggs and Ham, and The Cat in the Hat series.

Several studies indicate that student comprehension can be improved by CD-ROM storybooks (Matthew, 1997; Doty, Popplewell, & Byers, 2001). Additionally, research shows that student motivation to read can be enhanced as well. The multisensory environment, interactivity of activities, narration, and other attributes provide the user with support allowing them to focus on meaning rather than decoding. Research also demonstrates that CD-ROM storybooks provide immediate assistance to users, removing the need for teachers to provide students with immediate attention (Cazet, 1998; Doty, Popplewell, & Byers, 2001).

Educational CD-ROMs include various components that make them easy for teachers to use in their classrooms. For example, many educational CD-ROMs are bundled with lab packs and teacher guides (Cazet, 1998). These resources can give teachers ideas about how a particular CD-ROM can supplement their curriculum. Additionally, many educational CD-ROMs vary activity difficulty and track student progress to assist teachers in determining when the student has reached proficiency.

Future research in the area of educational CD-ROMs should focus on which components (i.e. animations, sound effects, etc.) affect student comprehension (Doty, Popplewell, & Byers, 2001). The results of such research would have implications for the design of CD-ROMs. For example, if sound effects were more beneficial for the development of certain type of literacy skills than another, CD-ROM designers may provide teachers with the option of turning certain aspects on or off.

Web-based ES

The third type of ES is the 'web-based ES.' We identify three different subgroups under this heading: one-dimensional ES, multi-dimensional ES, and hypermedia ES. They represent the web-based ES from the simple version to the integrated version of online ESs.

One-dimensional ES. The first sub-category of web-based storybooks is the "one-dimensional ESs." One-dimensional ESs incorporate a printed storybook into simple hypertext on the Internet. The structure of this storybook is the same as a traditional printed storybook except the reader uses the mouse and keyboard to turn the pages. The reader browses the story on the computer ubiquitously whenever they get online access without the need of printed books. The characteristics incorporated into this type of ES are similar with those embedded in traditional ES. It contains still graphics, text illustrations that accompany each graphic to form the sequence of the story, a linear story plot, linear links, and simple user control. The differences

between this type of ES and the traditional printed storybook are the methods of browsing, and the ubiquitous online access.

The website "[The Internet Public Library-Story Hour](#)" (Story Hour, 2000) features a collection of one-dimensional storybooks. Additional resources related to this section can be found at "[English Language Arts](#)" (Adams & Angeles, 2000), "[Focus on Young Adult Literature](#)" (Gill, 2000), "[Language Immersion Resources](#)" (Ketterer, 1998), "[Have a Look at the Latest Scoop: A Web Site of Children's Literature and More! Max Velez](#)" (1998), and the "[Interactive Stories and Books](#)" (Anderson-Inman & Horney, 1997).

"One-dimensional ES" use hypertext, reflecting new developments in the storybook field. It differs from the traditional ES in that the author could use the electronic environment to add a number of illustrative resources and links to supplementary information. Students benefit by visiting these links and by getting information and ideas from other online resources; so their overall motivation could be enhanced by receiving this product on the Internet (Johnston, 1995). Currently, the one-dimensional ES exists alone without other elements such as audio and animation.

Multi-dimensional ES. Symbolic graphics, simple animations, and musical accompaniments are characteristics of this type of ES. This sub-category illustrates the advances in ESs with its use of animated graphics and audio. Animations are used to advance the flat, simple layout of the still graphics in some dynamic way. The audio is often used as background music to liven or set the mood that the story intends to express. Although the story lacks vocal story telling, the music helps the reader gain deeper meaning than they would just reading the text. The stories contained on the website "[Folk legends of Japan](#)" (2001) are examples which represent the characteristics described above. The stories on this website apply simple animations to make the story dynamic while the background music helps involve the reader in the setting or mood of the story.

Teachers creating multi-dimensional ES can incorporate audio materials such as recorded narrations and music. In addition, the use of animation can liven the flat images. This simple media integration can help attract students' attention. Animation is especially important when teachers are going to express some important dynamic process in specific topics. Although a picture represents more than one thousand words, one animation is more effective than one hundred still pictures. For some literature, the music can interpret beyond what the words do. Thus, the multi-dimensional ES could be used to help students read a wide range of non-print texts, acquire new information, and build understanding of those texts, themselves, the many dimensions of human experience, and those of various cultures as well. A teacher can create a storybook that includes fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works and then decide on which kind of music to be used in order to get the desired effects in class.

Hypermedia ES. Anderson-Inman and Horney (1997) present four criteria for determining whether software is or is not an ES. The fourth is the importance of incorporating multimedia text enhancements. A hypermedia ES shares the feature of being web-based with one-dimensional and multi-dimensional ES. However, this fourth criteria, multimedia text enhancements, is what truly defines a Hypermedia ES.

Hypermedia ESs include a narrator, characters, plot structure, and other essential storytelling items. Although, in a Hypermedia storybook, the narrator infuses the human experience in telling a story presented to the reader visually and virtually

through multimedia technology. This ES integrates a high-level of graphics, animations, audio (spoken word, supporting sounds, and background music), video products, and interactivity. All of these aspects are weaved together to tell a rich, multi-sensory story.

The website "[Storybook Online Network](#)" (2002) presents good examples of Hypermedia ESs. The user-friendly control allows the reader to surf around the topics and stories in linear or non-linear modes. The sound effects and background music help to create the mood of the story. In addition to the use of Hypermedia, this website allows the reader to extend the story by their own will. They can continue the story and publish their compositions on the website.

Teachers can use these web-based ESs in the same way they use books in the classroom. For example, when students are provided with the opportunity to read traditional storybooks during class time, they could also be provided with time to access web-based ESs. Teachers can also create their own ESs with components that support their curricular goals. For example, they can provide their students with hyperlinks to websites they would like their students to explore.

Like educational CD-ROMs, future research on web-based ESs should focus on which components facilitate student comprehension. For example, researchers should investigate whether or not students explore supplementary information linked from storybooks. This may have implications for how teachers ask students to use this information. They may be more beneficial if teachers provide a framework for their use. In addition, due to the access of technology and knowledge about the creation of technological tools, there is a question about whether one-dimensional or multi-dimensional ESs will exist in favor of hypermedia-based ESs. Future research needs to address one- and multi-dimensional ESs in terms of their ability to be created by students and teachers vs. used by them. Moreover, as more hypermedia stories are created, the notion of pre-existing story is being replaced by 'story' as an evolving term, with many authors (to be discussed in the fourth category). Future research also needs to examine use of concrete vs. evolving and abstract notions of story.

Story Sharing

Previous categories presented in this paper focused on existing stories. This category focuses on the sharing of student created storybooks via the web and virtual worlds. In this category, we focus on the capacity of ES allow the teacher and the class to communicate through audio-video conferences, virtual reality graphic design, and hypertext writing. These ESs extend the traditional languages arts processes of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. Students can compose and publish their storybooks through the computer. The characteristics of this type of ES include an open-ended environment on the Internet, feedback programs, non-linear story playing, human user control, self-expression including plot writing, composition, arrangement, and reshuffling. These ESs are 'stories', borrowing on the loosest definition of the term story, in the sense that they are created by the user as co-author in virtual worlds. These stories can be read and created synchronously and asynchronously. In some examples, these visual storybooks draw on graphics, animations, sound effects, and the combination of many storytellers. Examples include Multi-User Dungeon (MUDs) and MUD object-oriented (MOO) environments. Some of these are difficult for teachers and students to participate in, however they offer the most possibility for creativity.

The stories featured on the website "[Kid's com-Write me a story](#)" (2002) are excellent examples for this ES. This website provides readers with the opportunity to interact with others, write stories from provided prompts, vote on stories of the

week, and read stories that other children have written online. If created on the Internet, this ES requires a significant amount of maintenance.

Early research has provided evidence that writing online provides students with the opportunity to become metacognitive about their writing (Strassman & D'Amore, 2002). Future research in this area needs to focus on the differences between teaching with existing stories and teaching the process of storying through non-existing outlets. Research also needs to focus on collaboration in writing online.

Category	Definition	Characteristics	Examples
Interactive Toys & Games	An electronic device that activates a previously passive object in order to motivate children to write, edit, collaborate, and share their stories or activities.	game-access learning, interaction between computational artifacts and the user, non-linear user control, feedback-based programs, human experience in real life, closed environments, real-world simulation, and recording and storage capability	Teddy Ruxpin LeapFrog™ learning products Lego Mindstorms™ Furby™ Neurosmith's MusicBlocks™ Robotics, i.e. the Stanford Robotics Laboratory
Educational CD-ROMs	Integration of content with animations, music, sound, slide shows, movies, audio-video clips, hypertext, graphics, and hypermedia in a closed environment on CD.	closed environment, animations, activities with multiple difficulty levels, tutorials, supplemental cues, editing functions: text, clipart, sound, and animation capabilities, diversity realistic scenes, feedback,	Broderbund's Living Book Series Simon S. (1995). Multimedia literature. Macmillan/McGraw-Hill School Division, a division of McGraw-Hill School Publishing Company. Panasonic (1997). Learning ladder. K-12 Education Edition (1998). Inspiration K-12 evaluation CD. Inspiration software, Inc. The learning company. (1995). Student writing center. The learning company. Interactive storytime. (1992). Multimedia products corp.

Web-based ES (one-dimensional ES)	Incorporate printed storybooks into simple hypertext on the Internet.	still graphics with accompanied text used to form the sequence of the story, browsing, ubiquitous online access	<p>Web Watches, May 1997 to June 2000 http://www.readingonline.org/electronic/watch/index.html Sites Linked to Standards for the English Language Arts Dennis M. Adams Rebecca Angeles http://www.readingonline.org/electronic/watch/adamsangeles/index.html Focus on Young Adult Literature David Gill Deborah L. Gill http://www.readingonline.org/electronic/yalitww.html Language Immersion Resources Kimberley A. Ketterer http://www.readingonline.org/electronic/watch/watch2.html Have a Look at the Latest Scoop: A Web Site of Children's Literature and More! Max Velez http://www.readingonline.org/electronic/watch/scoop.html Interactive Stories and Books Lynne Anderson-Inman http://www.readingonline.org/electronic/watch/watch1.html</p>
Web-based ES (multi-dimensional ES)	Symbolic graphics, simple animations, and musical accompaniments are used to make the story dynamic in an online environment.	symbolic graphics, simple animation, and music used to accompany text; ubiquitous online access	<p>Folk Legends of Japan http://www.jinjapan.org/kidsweb/folk.html</p>
Web-based ES (Hypermedia ES)	Electronic text presented visually, adopt aspects of traditional books, focus on an organizing theme, and incorporate multimedia text enhancements.	streaming video, narrator, characters, and sound effects that follow a plot structure	<p>The shape of stories: digital storytelling, hypertext poetry, and new multimedia expressions http://Georgetown.edu/bassr/bordertexts/web/stories.html Story and more; virtual narratives for electronic times http://acjournal.org/holdings/vol1/Iss2/editorials/nelsons/nelsons.htm</p>
Story-Sharing Tools	These storybooks evolve from the sharing of student created storybooks via	open-ended environment on the Internet, feedback programs, non-linear story	<p>Kid's com-Write me a story http://www.kidscom.com/create/write/write.html Georgia Institute of Technology's Moose Crossing http://www.cc.gatech.edu/elc/moose-crossing/</p>

	<p>the web and virtual worlds. These are stories based on the loosest definition of the term story created by the user as co-author in virtual worlds.</p>	<p>playing, human user control, self-expression including plot writing, composition, arrangement, and reshuffling</p>	<p>The WWWVL: http://tecfa.unige.ch/edu-comp/WWW-VL/eduVR-page.html</p>
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Table 1: Categories of ESs

Conclusion

Individuals are now doing extraordinary things with words, images, and sounds on the Internet. ESs are built upon the foundation of the Internet and the World Wide Web as a learning tool and as well as many technological instructions, which use the diversity of facilitation of technologies in supplement teaching and learning. ESs are excellent tools for the integration of technological media and instructional design into current instruction. Based on the research and existing models of ES, we can say that ESs are reshaping the use of instructional design in the use of multimedia. ESs help teachers reconstruct their teaching and ideas of how to use stories in their classroom. In addition, ESs are also reshaping the architecture of how young students learn to read and interpret text and images and how they use the web in the writing process (Adam & Angeles, 1999). ESs not only offer unique methods of instruction but, they also extend the spectrum of them.

This paper investigated and characterized the components of electronic storybooks. In order to gain the most from ESs, abilities in reading and interpreting imagery are absolute necessities for both teacher and students. Storybook designers have to consider critical issues prior to creating ESs. Future study of ESs should focus on understanding their use in the classroom, connecting their use with other instructional resources, and applying them to learning environments. Understanding the tools and the constraints of using them are the primary steps. We have to assess our technological limitations and how to deal with them. Once we do, we have to combine learning theory and technology so that the effect in teaching and learning is improved.

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