Children's book sharing through computer technology

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Children's book sharing through computer technology

Abstract
Computers have become a pervasive part of our society and an integral part of education. Computer technology can be implemented into a literature-based curriculum to support the development of children's thinking-language abilities. Computer software programs can inspire students to use language in purposeful ways as they read and engage in expressive activity. When employed appropriately, these computer programs can assist students' transition from emergent literacy to language competence.
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Abstract

Computers have become a pervasive part of our society and an integral part of education. Computer technology can be implemented into a literature-based curriculum to support the development of children’s thinking-language abilities. Computer software programs can inspire students to use language in purposeful ways as they read and engage in expressive activity. When employed appropriately, these computer programs can assist students' transition from emergent literacy to language competence.
Computer technology can offer exciting opportunities for learning. Seymour Papert (1993), creator of LOGO, views computers as open-ended devices to push knowledge to the limit. Students can use computers to generate a sense of ownership, discovery, and self-expression. They can create real products while demonstrating their learning processes.

Computers in the Language Arts Program

The National Reading Research Center is studying how computer-based activities can be integrated into the language arts curriculum (Reinking, 1993). Mehan, Miller-Souviney and Riel (1984) believe that computers are most effective in a language arts program, when they are not treated as an isolated activity but are viewed as tools to meet educational goals.

Computers can be a complement to students’ literacy development by supporting and extending their involvement with the language processes. They can assist children in creating meaning through the language processes, thus extending their thinking-language abilities (Henk & Rickelman, 1990).

Students can learn that computers are instruments to be used to develop literacy, promote creativity, and further their understanding of literature. They can support students’ efforts to read and write in meaningful ways because students own tasks and see computers as means to express their thoughts (Loader,
1993). Therefore, students can be highly motivated to learn through computer experiences, for they are empowered to make their own decisions.

Technology can change reading and writing in the classroom. Through various computer software programs, students are able to process the meaning of literature works in ways that develop and expand their understanding (DeGroff, 1990).

Computers are able to offer students a variety of technological tools that can facilitate writing, problem-solving, and stimulate imagination, thus enhancing their language development. Students’ use of word processing experiences results in increased writing production and interest in writing (Benjamin, Bryant, & Mack, 1990).

Dickinson (1986) concluded that computers put different communicative demands on the children, encouraging them to talk about their writing and to respond to each others’ ideas.

Ways to Share Books Through Computer Technology

Children’s language and personal-social abilities are nurtured through sharing with others the ideas they have generated from reading. Children benefit from knowing many ways to share their reading experiences (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993; Harms & Lettow, 1992).
Ways are suggested for children in grades two and three to share their reading. Accompanying these suggestions will be software that will facilitate sharing through speaking, writing, and the graphic and performing arts. The recommended software is based on current reviews found in professional literature and published by major software evaluation services. The criteria used to assess the programs were design, ease of use, and potential for nurturing creativity.

Awards and documents. Awards can be created for a story character. For example, *Sheila Rae, the Brave*, by Kevin Henkes (N.Y.: Greenwillow, 1987) can be given an award for bravery. A certificate program can create documents related to story characters (e.g., birth certificate, driver’s license, charge card, and school report card).

Several programs are available for composing awards and documents. *Award Maker Plus* is a program for creating awards, licenses, coupons and other documents. Students can use hundreds of pre-designed award styles or can develop their own designs. Users can choose the text style, color, and border style to create a personal message. Some styles allow the entry of the users’ own hi-resolution (high quality image) pictures.

*Certificates and More* is a program used to create printed certificates and rewards, single-page signs, and posters. The program offers templates, or users can create from their own
borders, choosing from 9 choices of fonts (text style of print/typefaces) and 200 pieces of clip art (pre-designed pictures that can be placed anywhere on page).

The New Print Shop is an upgraded version of the Print Shop program. It offers many features such as 100 new higher resolution graphics with full-panel awards and certificates that can be personalized with names and dates. Graphics and fonts can be placed anywhere on a single page. Designs can be previewed at any time.

Laser Award Maker is used to make attractive, engraved-looking certificates and awards. Awards can be customized by choosing from 300 award styles, four typefaces, and a variety of borders. Text also can be typed in. The program provides samples.

Bookmaking. Ideas from books can serve as models for students' own bookmaking. Children can make pop-up books, such as David Pelham's A Is for Animals (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1991). They also can make question and answer-type riddle books similar to those presented in Patricia Mullin's Dinosaur Encore (N.Y.: HarperCollins, 1993). Fairy tales, such as Trina Schart Hyman's Little Red Riding Hood (N.Y.: Holiday House, 1983), can be retold in children's own words and illustrations.

This software can assist children in constructing books. Young Authors is a writing and painting program for creating 25
different kinds of books. Some examples of the types of books included are pop-ups, shape books, poems, songs, and joke books. It includes clip-art, reference tools, and spell checker.

Big Book Maker: Favorite Fairy Tales & Nursery Rhymes uses characters from well-known fairy tales and nursery rhymes to encourage students to write. The characters and text can be combined to take up two screens. It includes detailed art and an easy-to-use text processor with 6 type styles and a variety of printout sizes. Pages can be saved, printed, and put together to form a "big book."

My Own Stories offers over 1,000 object and scenery combinations to help students write stories. It has a built-in word processor. A color button can vary text, object and skin color. Multiple font sizes and styles can be used for text. Students can cut and paste and customize by using picture only, text only, or both picture and text. Stories can be printed in standard or big book size in 3 different sizes. In composing a taped story, sound effects (41 sounds) and music can be played at the beginning and end of the story.

Storybook Weaver is a program that allows students to create their own storyline, graphics, and scenery. Students can develop pictures and text one page at a time. It includes 650 images, 48 colors, 468 scenery combinations, 36 sounds, 12 page
borders, and 5 type styles. Oral stories can be enhanced by sound effects and music (12 songs).

Easy Book is a program that helps students make simple books. Students can write their stories and then illustrate them with a built-in paint program or with stamps. Special features include print on both sides of the page (pages face each other for binding), title page, and cover. There are 250 clip-art pieces. The school version includes a teacher's guide.

Book jackets. This element of book design can be used to promote a favorite book with an original drawing or one using clip art. Children's book jackets can be displayed in the classroom library or school hall. Color Me: The Computer Coloring Kit enables students to draw, color, and compose pictures with text capability. It is a paint program designed especially for young children. Students can use pre-drawn pictures or draw freehand.

Bookmarks. From a text and/or illustrations, children can feature a drawing of a character, the title of the book, the name of the author/illustrator, and phrases or quotes from a book. Certificates and More is a program that can be used to create bookmarks. It is described in the section Awards and Documents.

Book review. A word processing program can be used to make a written review of a book or group of books on a specific topic. The review(s) can include a brief summary, an illustration, an
evaluation, and reasons for liking the book. *Children’s Writing & Publishing Center* is a program designed for ease in creating a text. Features include word processing, picture selection, and page design to help students produce reports, letters, stories, and newsletters. Simple instructions appear on the screen. It includes a variety of fonts and over 150 pictures. The school version includes teacher support material.

**Bulletin boards.** Characters and settings from stories and works of a specific author can be recreated for bulletin boards through posters, banners and signs. *Bulletin Board Maker with Super Print II (Anytime Art)* enables the user to create huge posters, customized banners, borders and signs. It includes 15 posters, seasonal and holiday graphics, letters, numbers and animals. This program enables students to experiment with various media, such as air brushing (air brushes emulate the action of a spray can).

**Cartoons and comic strips.** Events from a story can be illustrated in cartoon form. Students can turn a serious situation into a humorous one. Cartoons can include both graphics and dialogue. Susan Meddaugh’s *Martha Speaks* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992) is an example of a book that could easily be transposed into a cartoon or a comic strip with bubbles.

These software programs can be used to create cartoons and comic strips. *Pow! Zap! Kerplunk! The Comic Book Maker* enables
students to design their own authentic-looking comic books. It includes various features such as backgrounds, speech bubbles to create dialogue, and clip art complete with heroes, heroines and villains. Text sizes and styles can be printed in 7 different sizes. Comics can be printed as cards, signs, mobiles or books.

**Cartoonin'** is a program that enables students to create colorful pictures for their own animated adventures with ready to use backgrounds, objects, characters, scene animator with text bubbles, and a story editor that lets them put scenes together to create their own comics.

**Crossword puzzles.** Puzzles can include story elements—characters, events, and settings; titles and authors; and words and phrases from stories.

These are examples of software programs that can facilitate the construction of crossword puzzles. **Mickey's Crossword Puzzle Maker** enables students to create and print crossword puzzles using word and picture clues. The computer arranges the puzzle with word clues or picture clues (180 pictures available).

**Crossword Creator** enables users to create instant puzzles with their own word lists. **Puzzle Pursuits** contains 20 pre-existing word lists to create puzzles. Users can also create puzzles from their own lists. Students can generate a crossword puzzle, word jumble puzzle, or word search puzzle. **Word Search**
Deluxe is a program that enables users to create hidden puzzles using their own lists of words.

**Games.** Large gameboards can be made that ask students to sequence story events and describe story characters. *Jumanji*, by Chris Van Allsburg (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), is an example of a book that has been made into a gameboard. The program, Certificates and More, can be used to create gameboards. It is described in the section Awards and Documents.

**Letters and cards.** Letters can be written to story characters or authors and illustrators of books. A letter can also be written from a character’s point of view. Personalized letterheads can also be made for characters. Cards can also be sent to imaginary characters, and authors or illustrators. In the *Jolly Postman and Other People's Letters*, by Jane and Allan Ahlberg (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), letters occur throughout the book.

These programs can assist in making letters and cards. The program, Certificates and More, as described in the section Awards and Documents, can be used to create greeting cards. The program offers templates and includes 9 fonts (typefaces) and 200 pre-designed clip art pieces that can be placed anywhere on the card.

The Print Shop Deluxe enables the user to design greeting cards that feature both side-fold and top-fold cards. It features
over 300 color graphics and 30 typefaces (print styles). The school edition contains a teacher’s guide.

Children’s Writing and Publishing Center features word processing, picture selection, and page design to help students produce reports, letters, stories and newsletters with ease. Simple instructions appear on the screen. It includes a variety of fonts and over 150 pictures. The school version includes teacher support material.

Logo Writer - School Version allows students to use LOGO to create greeting cards. With the Logo Writer, students can analyze problems, devise plans, and see if their plans work. The program includes 25 turtle shapes plus a shape editor that allows students to create their own shapes and provides easy save features, word processing functions such as cut and paste, turtle graphics, and complete LOGO programming capabilities.

Movies. A movie retelling a story can be made by drawing pictures of the main events in the story. Students can re-create scenes from stories with definite events, such as those found in the folk tale, Little Red Riding Hood or Helme Heine’s The Most Wonderful Egg in the World (N.Y.: Atheneum, 1983).

Amazing Animation enables students to easily create computer animations. It has progressive learning levels that are designed to nurture creative thinking, problem solving, and
organization of information. It includes backgrounds, stamps or animated characters, painting, and text tools.

**Paper toys.** Paper dolls and masks of story characters can be created for retelling. Masks can be created for a story retelling of Audrey Wood's *The Napping House* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984). *Kid Cuts* is a program that enables the user to design paper hats, animals, masks, paper dolls, and more. These items are decorated on the screen and can be printed and cut out. The school version contains a teacher's guide.

**Posters.** Large images can be created to focus on an important story event, the author/illustrator’s work, or a particular topic. They can be displayed as part of an author center. An Eric Carle author center can include poster pictures of insects from his books, such as *The Grouchy Ladybug* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1986) and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (N.Y.: Philomel Books, 1994).

Several programs can facilitate poster-making. *Certificates and More* can be used to create full-blown, four-page posters. Posters can be printed as large as 17" x 22". The program offers templates, 9 fonts, and 200 pre-designed clip art pieces that can be placed anywhere on the poster.

*Super Print II: The Next Generation*, a program designed specifically for schools, enables users to create posters and banners. The message is typed, graphics can be chosen or drawn
with paint tools, and printed. It includes 180 clip art pieces with 18 categories. Posters can be printed in 8 sizes.

**Designer Prints** combines drawing and graphics that can be used to create wall-size posters. It includes 9 font styles, over 100 borders, and a large variety of graphics that can be placed anywhere on the page. Users can create their own designs by using the drawing tools. **The New Print Shop** described in the section Awards and Documents can also be used to create posters.

**Puppets.** Puppet faces can be made to dramatize a story. The faces can be attached to bags, paper plates, or wooden sticks.

Several programs can provide assistance for puppet-making. **Puppet Maker** enables the user to design and print four types of puppets (walking, shoebox, finger, and paper bag) by choosing from the following categories: castles, pirates, farm, zoo, safari, people, parade, and sports. Students can add features, such as clothing and hair, to puppets with simple keystrokes. Puppets can be printed in black and white or color.

**Puppet Playhouse** enables students to experience the fun of creating and staging their own puppet show. Students can develop their own story and color their puppets. Features include over 270 printed characters and objects that can be printed in 3 different sizes with two-sided characters from the Once Upon A Time Series (farm, safari, mainstreet, underwater, dinosaur, forest, space, medieval, wild west). Also included are 18
different printed large-size background scenes, instructions for finger, stick, bag and felt puppets, as well as stage construction and puppet sticks.


**Timelines.** These visuals can offer perspectives of story events, such as the progression of the girl, Oreo, in searching for her tooth in *Airmail to the Moon*, written by Tom Birdseye and illustrated by Stephen Gammell (N.Y.: Holiday House, 1988), or the actions of the three little pigs and the wolf in the folk tale *The Three Little Pigs*. Students can identify dates or periods of major events in a story. These are entered and calculated in correct chronological order. A proportionally accurate timeline can be printed. *MacTimeliner* enables students to create their own timelines for a day, week, year or several years. It includes enhanced printing options, clip art, and customizable options and scales.
Summary

Computer software programs have the potential for fostering children's language growth. Ways for children to share their reading and software to support these expressive activities have been presented. These activities enable students opportunities to respond to literature. However, the effectiveness of the software depends on its quality and the way it is used to facilitate understanding, stimulate imagination, and enhance language learning.
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