



Professional Learning
Research
Innovation

Learning in Practice

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About the Barker Institute:

- Provides a centre for research, reflective practice, professional learning and innovation in education
- Is a resource hub that facilitates the ongoing development of learning for teachers, allowing them to stay abreast of emerging practice, constantly striving to refine the quality of teaching and learning
- Looks to develop collaborative ventures with other institutions and providers, initiating research and innovation combined with the implementation of new projects and programs for the benefit of students, staff and the broader community
- Shares current research and issues with parents, professional bodies and educators around the globe through ongoing symposia, forums, lectures and conferences

About the Learning in Practice Journal:

As a leader in Christian education, Barker College aims to both demonstrate and inform best practice. This journal was developed to showcase a range of initiatives and research projects from across the School. It explains the rationale behind innovations in practice and archives pivotal developments in Barker's academic, co-curricular and pastoral realms.

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Dr Brad Merrick
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About the Author

Melanie Webster worked in public libraries before moving into the education sector. Currently she is a Teacher Librarian in the Secondary School and she is involved with a literacy program for middle-school students. Passionate about reading and helping teens to enjoy literature, she is particularly interested in YA fiction and using multimedia to engage readers, promote diversity and support Australian content.

Using Video and multimedia to engage Year 7 students in recreational reading

Melanie Webster
Teacher Librarian

Abstract

Promoting reading is a key concern of the library and it supports the school-wide policy of promoting literacy across the curriculum. To this end, all Year 7 students participate in the Library Reading Time Programme one lesson per fortnight. The program objective is to encourage recreational reading by providing a comfortable space where relevant, fun and self-directed reading is facilitated. To inspire further engagement, the use of multimedia was introduced as a stimulus for discussion and critical thinking. Action research was undertaken to investigate the effect of this on students' engagement. The question asked was: What effect does video and multimedia viewed in the Year 7 reading program have on student engagement?

Background

Library Reading Time (LRT) has been running at Barker College for almost fifteen years. It was developed in response to a concern at the time regarding the declining reading rate among teenage boys (Masters, 2014). In collaboration with staff from the English Department, two teacher librarians designed a programme that included key components vital for engaging readers. These were: choice, access, a supportive teacher and a class environment where students feel valued. A mixed format of reading aloud, class discussion, book browsing and silent reading was adopted. Typically, the teacher librarians read aloud from a novel which is followed by a discussion and a period of sustained silent reading.

Although this program addressed literacy concerns within the School, statistics show that in Australia literacy scores continue to decline. The PISA Report (2015) confirms that while Australia scores well when compared to other OECD countries, since 2009 literacy results have slowly been decreasing. Some in the media have lamented the death of the book, with screen time sometimes identified as a reason why teenagers are reading less (Denby, 2016).

However, in today's world, screen time is unavoidable. Students use digital media in their normal lives as routine. They operate in a society where communication is multimodal. While the written word is key, more interactive and visual methods of exchanging information have been adopted. As Callow (2013, p. viii) notes, images "pervade our waking hours and sometimes our sleep". Many educators have welcomed the changes (Dalton & Grisham, 2013) and the potential they have for use in the classroom, to "draw on students out-of-school literacies to help them perform better" (Sewell & Denton, 2011, p 61).

The opportunities of digital media also offer potential for the LRT program in terms of providing a bridge between students' in-school reading and their lifeworld interests. Consequently, and in keeping with its philosophy of making reading fun and relevant to engage students, short video clips were introduced into the LRT lessons. I considered this visual element would reflect the current "lived" experience of students and would offer more visual learners a way into books they read both in and outside school. The clips selected were designed to complement and build on program content and stimulate further learning opportunities, enjoyment and reflection. They were not a substitute for reading, but rather an additional component of the lesson. To determine if embedding visual stimuli into the course was worthwhile I would investigate the effect video and multimedia viewed in the Year 7 reading programme had on student engagement.

The Research Process

Using Stringer's (2014) cyclical action research model of Look-Think-Act, a predominantly qualitative approach was taken to explore the research question. Stringer notes that action research enables practitioners "to engage in a systematic inquiry and investigation to design an appropriate way of accomplishing a desired goal and to evaluate its effectiveness" (p.6).

The Action

Surveys, interviews and participant observations were conducted in class in the related discussion, book selection and independent reading time. Research data gathered was collected from two classes comprising approximately 20 students each through:

- Observation
- Surveys
- Interviews
- Discussion

Two surveys were carried out: one at the start of the project and another at the conclusion. Survey 1 gave a good indication of the students' attitudes towards the library and how they judged their school reading and reading in general. The follow-up survey conducted at the end of the research study contained more detailed questions about the use of video used in the library reading sessions. Interviews were conducted with a small focus group of three students and participants were observed during class discussions, book selection and independent reading time.

These lessons were carried out in two cycles. The first cycle showed book and movie trailers. Like movie trailers, book trailers are short clips designed to build interest and entice the viewer to engage in a story. In the second cycle, the action was expanded and a more diverse range of footage was shown including news clips, Google Earth, documentary excerpts and interviews. These were to build context, explain key ideas and cover potential gaps in understanding.

Results and Discussion

From analysis of the data three main themes emerged in relation to the use of multimedia to engage students in reading:

1. Promotion of the fiction collection: The first was the way that students took what had been viewed and discussed and used it to inform their reading and borrowing choices via genre. The videos shown made it easier for them to determine the type of genres we were covering in the program and beyond. In one of the interview sessions when asked if they felt the inclusion of “screen-time” into the lessons had been worthwhile, a student responded by stating that: “I think it is worth having because then you can find what book you like and other books”. On several occasions and without prompting, the issue of genre was raised. The videos created visual cues to stimulate students thinking about different genre types and how the Library’s fiction collection is divided into separate categories. Students valued choice and the opportunity to discover and learn about what they like; key outcomes when encouraging students to be engaged in their own independent reading (Merga & Moon, 2016). This was an unintended but pleasing result.

2. Use of multi-media encouraged critical thinking: The second theme was critical thinking and the way students used visual elements to expand on concepts. The discussion that followed the viewing of the trailers indicated that the students reacted to not only what they had viewed, but also the source material. What the students had seen allowed them to explore themes from the novel. For example, after listening to a passage being read and watching the movie trailer for *A Monster Calls*, students debated if the monster was real or not. They questioned the idea of “the inner monster”. The video served to draw out deep responses and reactions, enabling the students to engage more in the text. One student, to support his point of view, quoted from the book. This quote came not from the section previously read to them, but rather from another section of the book that was used in the trailer. In a short time frame, the students had identified complex themes emerging from the book that had been communicated in both written and visual mediums. While most students responded favourably when asked about videos being used in the lessons, it is worth noting that one student did raise concerns. He spoke about how watching the trailers had impacted on how he imagined characters. For future lessons, re-structuring the lesson might be necessary, with an opt-out option incorporated for those not wishing to view the footage. Students would be allowed to browse the fiction collection prior to viewing of the clip in order to avoid seeing someone else’s visualisation of the book. There is also scope to develop further learning opportunities with lesson content developed to address individual interpretations of texts, how analysis can vary and so on.

3. Use of multimedia enhanced the enjoyment of reading: The discussions that followed the viewing of the videos and multimedia shown indicated that the students reacted to not only what they had viewed, but also the emotions these provoked. When asked to describe what it is they do in the program, many participants responded by saying that they “read and relax.” From the interview responses it was clear that students valued the chance to slow down and take a break from their busy school routine. A positive attitude towards the scheduled reading time was evidenced. In this the teacher librarian plays a critical role, cultivating a secure space where students feel confident to share ideas and enjoy their reading. Showing the videos to students and allowing them to share their thoughts on the book in a conversational setting gave the reading sessions a relaxed and fun tone. Interviews

with a small sample group of students confirmed that they approved of the use of videos in the lesson. Of the eight students interviewed when asked if they felt “screen-time” in class was worthwhile, all were unanimous in their support. In the surveys, when all of the research participants were asked if they liked having book trailers included in the lesson, 75% indicated that they did. For movie trailers the approval rate was higher, with 90% wanting them to remain as part of the regular lesson sequence. Not a single student selected the response option of removing videos from the program. The different types of video shown were positively received. At the start of the lessons, some students were now asking me what we would be watching in class that day and what we would be reading.

Conclusion

Action research has helped determine the success of integrating video into a book based literacy programme. From the surveys, student interviews and classroom observations, incorporating videos into regular LRT lessons has proven to be worthwhile. Classroom discussion and enthusiasm have indicated that students are engaged in what they are viewing and can think about and connect this back to the selected text and the wider fiction collection in general. By expanding access and enjoyment in addition to providing real world connections, engagement is enhanced. Students have indicated that they are happy with the range and variety of content used and preferred videos included in the lesson than without.

From a teaching perspective, it is essential that content selected is up-to-date, connects with students and allows for deeper thinking. It must be used to enhance reading and enjoyment rather than distract from it. If selected and shown appropriately, a small amount of “screen time” can have a positive effect on Year Seven students and their reading.

The results of this action research project suggest that while consideration needs to be taken in terms of selecting relevant material and managing how it impacts on individual textual analysis, the use of video within the LRT program should continue. Appealing to visual learners and offering another way into the book, carefully selected visual content helped students develop a deeper understanding of texts, made them more aware of the range of genres available and generated positive emotions associated with the act of reading. Video clips and multimedia used have had a positive effect on student engagement.

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