

Integrating Multimedia Storybooks into the Literacy Curriculum:

Isaac de la Fuente

Teacher's College at Columbia University

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Prof. Ofelia Garcia

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Introduction

Inconsistent progress in English literacy and discrepancies between classroom literacy instruction have led schools and districts to mandate large scale, pre-packaged literacy programs. Although these pre-packaged literacy programs have evolved and improved over time, specific support for English Language Learners has not typically been the driving force of this evolution. I hope to create a literacy component specifically for ELLs and show how it could be integrated into a pre-established literacy program. More specifically I propose the integration of multimedia, bilingual storybooks into the overall structure of pre-reading, reading and post-reading activities. I propose that the storybooks will scaffold reading comprehension and overall literacy development; acting as an advance organizer, aiding in eliciting prior knowledge and lowering cognitive demands during other L2 activities such as whole class exercises, group work or independent reading. An increase in comprehension before L2 instruction will allow the ELLs to further utilize reading strategies and afford them opportunities to more fully participate in other literacy activities.

Theory

Effective readers utilize different strategies to make meaning of text. The more strategies we have, the higher the chances are that we can comprehend the text. Gibbons (2002) provided an adaptation from Bradford and Johnson (1972) to show how even skilled readers with relevant knowledge can read a text and yet lack the necessary clues for comprehension:

The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be sufficient, depending on how much you have to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities, then that is the next step; otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. that is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run this may not seem important, but compli-

cations can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well...After the procedure is completed, one arranges the materials into different groups again. Then they can be put into their appropriate places. Eventually they can be used once more, and the whole cycle will then have to be repeated.

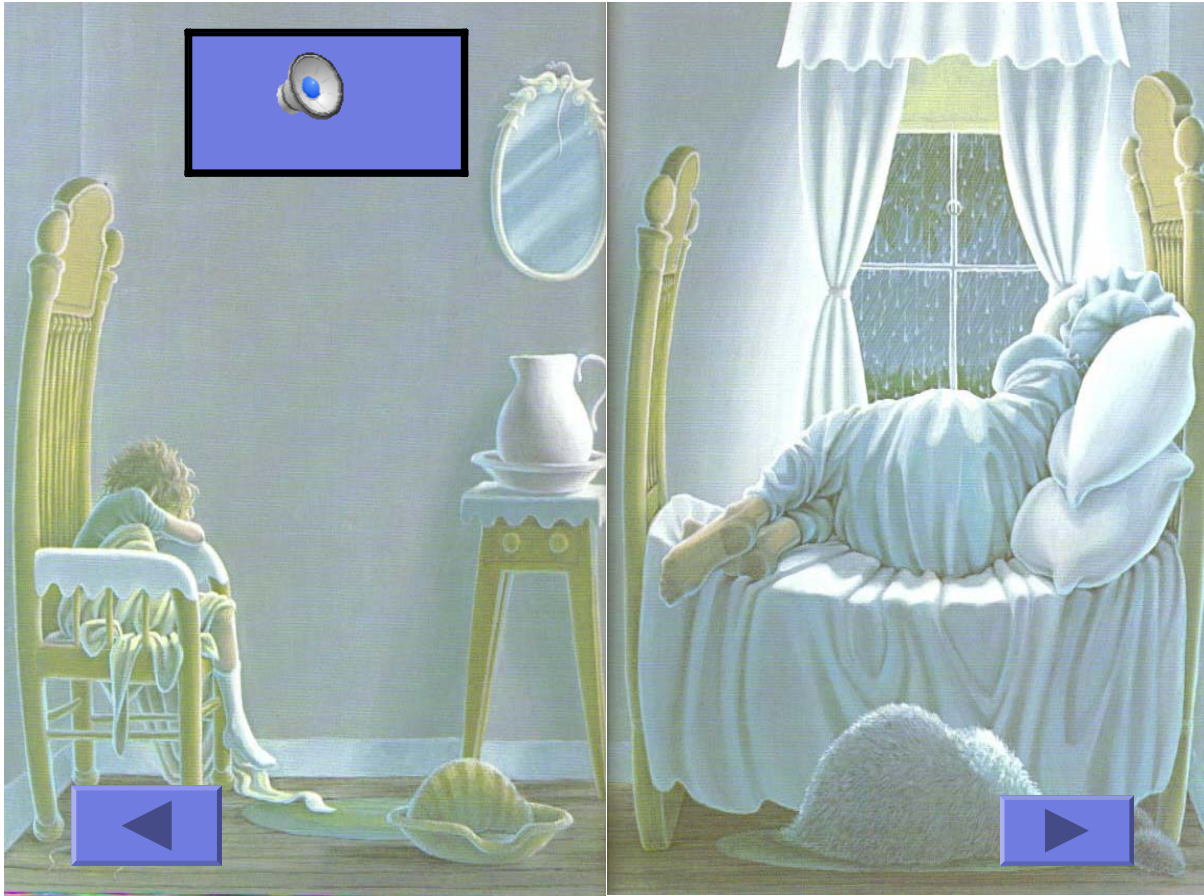
We are able to read the text, but determining exactly what the paragraph is about is very difficult. Similarly it is extremely difficult to summarize the main points of the text without having an understanding of what it is about. Gibbons noted, "This places you in a similar position as ESL learners who are asked to summarize texts that contain content that is unfamiliar to them." (p. 80) Telling you that the passage is about doing laundry, brings clarity to the passage as a whole and allows better understanding of individual sentences. Gibbons continued, "Yet what has changed? Certainly not the words on the page. What has changed is the nature of your interaction with the text--You are now reading about things that make sense to you and that link with your own experiences." (p. 80) This example illustrates the potential benefit of providing ELLs with L1 exposure to a text (the form of exposure e.g. visual, auditory etc. will be discussed later in the paper) before L2 instruction begins. Gibbons later says, "It has been found, for example, that ESL children who hear a story initially in their mother tongue better understood unfamiliar language structures of the story when it was later read in English. " (p. 85) The reasoning for this may be that comprehension of the text lowers the cognitive load and allows the reader to focus on unfamiliar language structures rather than allocating these cognitive processes towards comprehension. Shook (1997) summarized work done by (McLaughlin, Rossman & McLeod, 1983; Anderson, 1985) stating that, "researchers in cognitive psychology have come to view human beings as limited-capacity processors who, due to factors such as task demands and experience with the information, cannot process all of the information to which they are exposed at one time. Therefore, the

more difficult the activities are that one does at one time, and the more unfamiliar the information is that one encounters, the more likely it is that one will process only parts, and not all, of the information received.” (p. 236) Thus, an increase in comprehension might potentially lower the cognitive load of the ELLs; allowing them to focus on these unfamiliar structures and have more opportunity to learn them.

Storybook Components

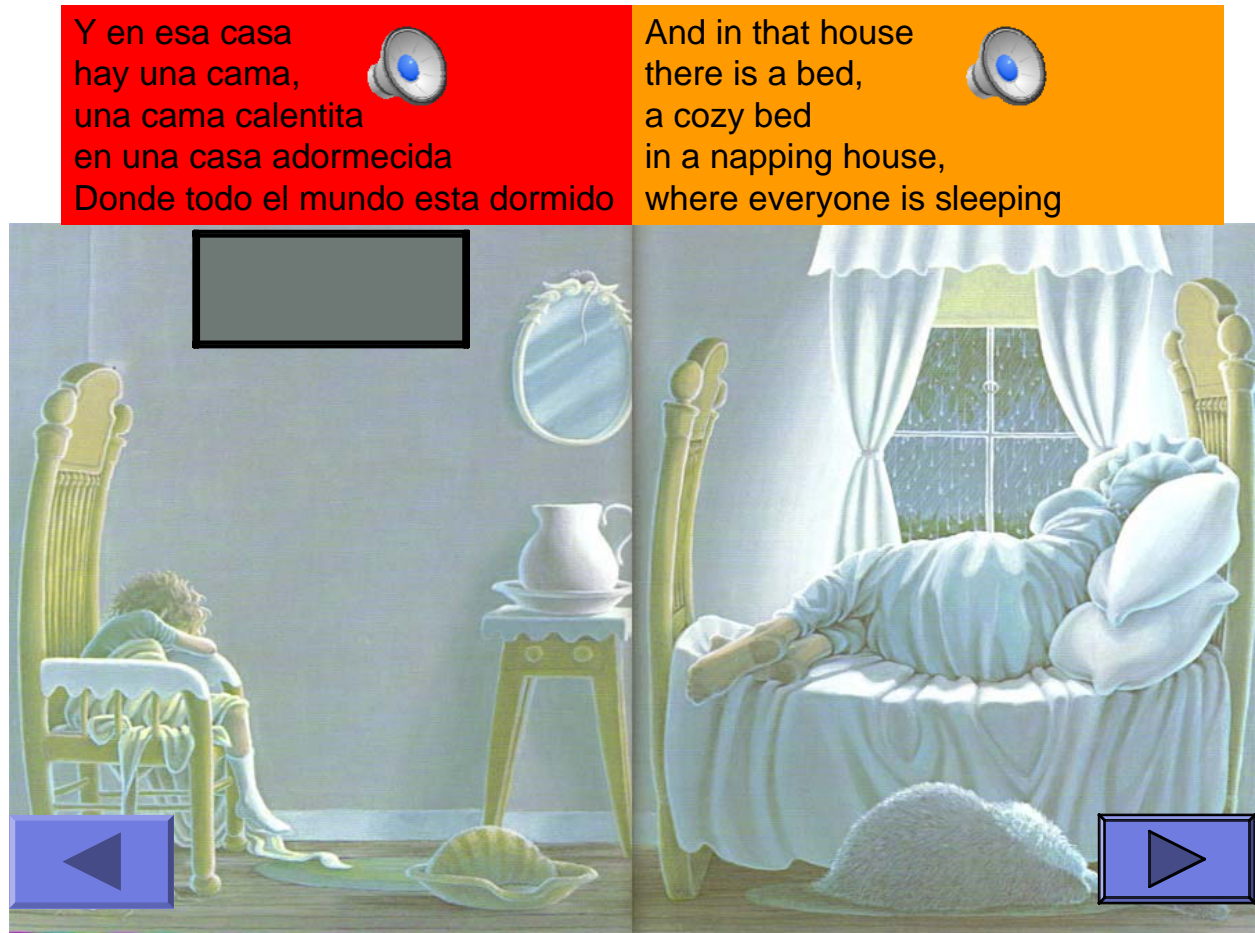
I propose that for optimal effectiveness, the storybook should be divided into three different stages which should be seen as three distinct entry points into the literacy curriculum. The entry points are not mutually exclusive nor are they dependent upon one another and can be used individually or collectively throughout literacy instruction.

Stage 1 (Pre-Reading Activity): The initial presentation of the storybook, integrated with other teacher-led pre-reading activities, hopes to establish global comprehension of the story. The text is omitted from the pages and the student hears the story in their native language while viewing the illustrations. The omission of the text hopes to lower the cognitive demands during the initial reading, thus increasing the comprehension capacity of the student. Research has shown that providing too much stimuli within a particular modality can have a deleterious effect on comprehension (Park & Hannafin, 1993). The illustration below shows how this pre-reading activity might look. Note the omission of the text with audio control and page movement given to the student.



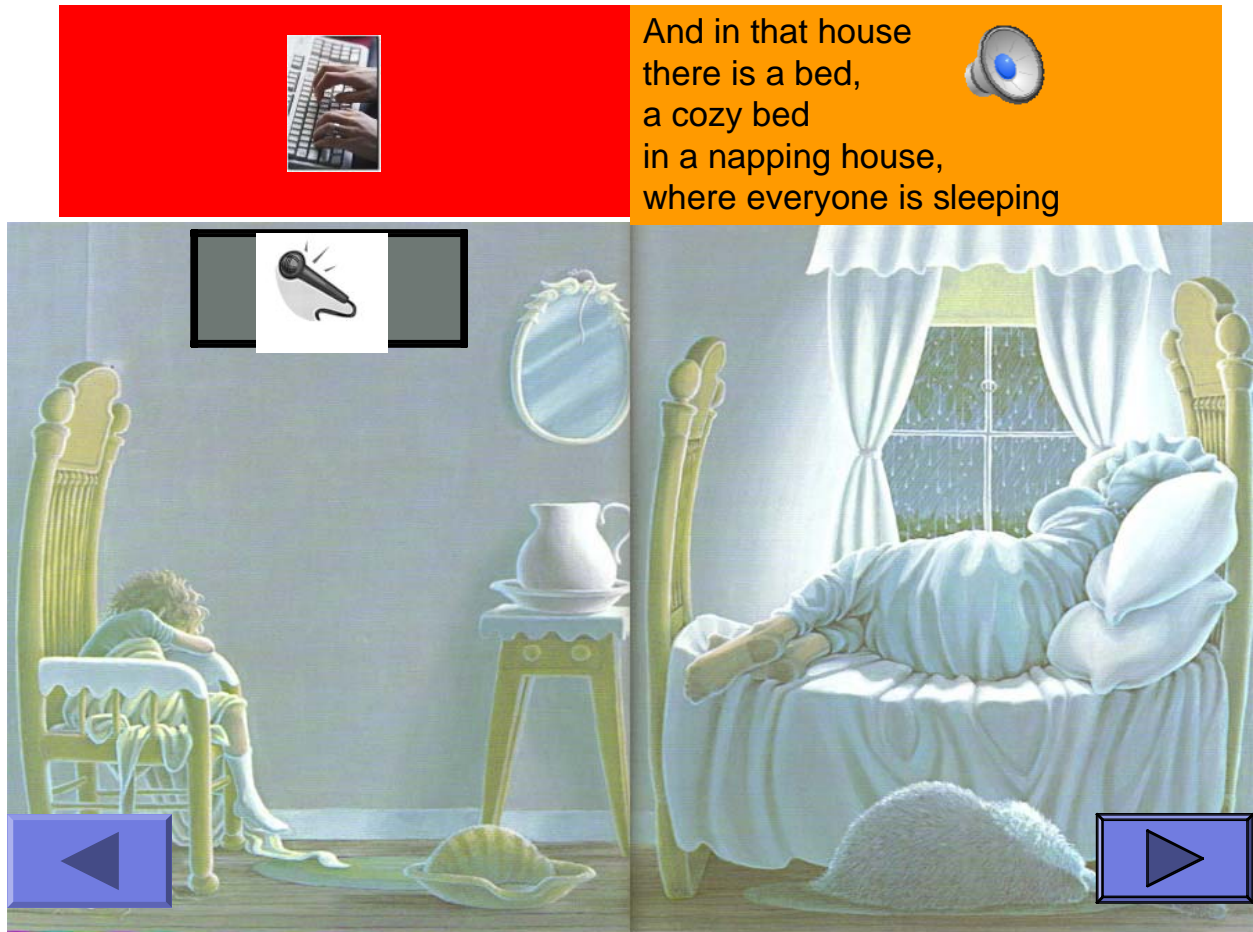
Sample Mock-up of what the 1st stage of the storybook might look like. Picture taken from *La Casa Adormecia* por Don Wood.

Stage 2 (Reading Activity): Following pre-reading activities, the second entry point of the storybook scaffolds L2 text comprehension with L1 text. The student is now presented the storybook with both L1 and L2 text and has the ability to listen to the text in L1 or L2. The focus of this second stage is placed on the actual text. It must be noted that teacher intervention is critical during this stage as the L1 and L2 texts provide opportunity for language comparison and difficult text structure analysis. Notice below how the text is placed side-by-side with the student in control of the audio options and overall storybook navigation.



Sample Mock-up of what the 2nd stage of the storybook might look like. Picture taken from *La Casa Adormecida* por Don Wood.

Stage 3 (Post-Reading Activity): The third entry point for the storybook follows pre-reading and reading activities and might take place during writing or talking activities. In this stage, the student has the opportunity to produce L1 or L2 spoken or written language, utilizing the recording and text entry features of the program. Once again, teacher intervention is critical as the appropriateness of each activity is dependent upon the language abilities of the student and the classroom literacy objectives. Notice the microphone and keyboard icons in the screen shot below, which provide the option to record audio or written text in L1 or L2.



Sample Mock-up of what the 3rd stage of the storybook might look like. Picture taken from *La Casa Adormecida* por Don Wood.

Classroom Integration

Find below a sample of a New York City Literacy instruction program by Christina Celic and how the bilingual multimedia storybooks could be integrated into her classroom.

The entry point of the storybooks are highlighted. (Borrowed from powerpoint presentation on April 26th, 2006)

Reading:

- Whole group Mini-Lesson (10 min)
 - **Stage 1 Storybook (Focus on Comprehension)**
- Independent Reading (30 min)
 - **Stage 2 Storybook (Focusing on the Text)**
(Teacher establishes a particular focus of the reading)
 - Meet with small groups (10 min each)
 - Conferences (about 5 min each)
- Book Clubs/Partnerships (5-10 min)
- Read Aloud (15-20 min)
- Shared Reading (5-10min)

Writing:

- Whole group mini-lesson (10 min)
- Independent writing (30 min)
 - **Stage 3 Storybook (Production)**
(Teacher decides on the modality of production)
 - Meet with small groups (10 min each)
 - Conference (about 5 min each)
- Share (5-10 min)

Sustainability/Community Involvement

It is unreasonable to expect everyday classroom teachers to find the time and resources necessary to translate and record the storybooks on a continual basis. Thus much of the success of the project lies in the hands of parents and community members who speak the L1 of the ELLs. The use of local vernacular will hopefully validate the many different varieties of any given language and look to serve as a bridge into home and cultural values. The best case scenario would have parents, family or community

members of language minority students visiting the classroom on a weekly basis to translate and record the books necessary for the week. A less optimal but acceptable scenario would be to send a simple, cheap, digital recording device home with ELL students along with the literature for the week. The benefits of family and community involvement are innumerable and once a workable routine has been established, the maintenance and continuance of the program become much easier. The students themselves should be seen as a valuable resource in the translation and creation process and should be producing versions of the book during Stage 3. Over time, the teacher should be able to accumulate a multitude of storybooks in a variety of language, allowing for an extensive variety of local vernacular.

Conclusion:

Gibbons (2002) reported on the results of a large study in the U.S. conducted by Thomas and Collier (1999) which found 3 key predictors for the academic success of language minority students. "The first predictor was English language support through subject areas combined with support in the first language. The second was the use of current approaches to teaching the curriculum through two languages. The third was the socio-cultural climate of the school itself: where the school curriculum was inclusive of ESL students and their language and cultural background" (Gibbons, 2002, p. 11).

Cummins (2000) suggested four key areas that schools should address in order to be inclusive of minority students: (1) community and parent participation; (2) cultural and linguistic incorporation; (3) assessment; and (4) pedagogy. The bilingual multimedia storybooks hope to be a part of the academic success of language minority students by addressing these predictors of success and focusing on those key areas. The story-

books should be seen as an integral part of the overall literacy plan and altered to meet the changing needs of the language minority students that it hopes to serve.

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