How Teachers Can Best Use E-Books To Help ELL Students: A Web-Design Project

by Paul R. Davis

An artifact paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University
St. Paul, Minnesota
August 2018

Advisors: Susan Manikowski and Julianne Scullen
Content Expert: Kristin Butterfield
PROJECT SUMMARY

Central Question and Rationale

The central question of my capstone project is, *How can teachers best use independent reading with E-Books to benefit elementary English language learners?* I decided to pursue the answer to this question because I have always believed that independent reading is a critical element of literacy development. However, when I have tried to implement independent reading in the past, I have not been able to get English language learner (ELL) students to become passionate readers. I wanted to find out if E-Books, which have many features which support struggling readers and students with low vocabularies, help them to read avidly.

Literature Review

When I conducted a review of literature to find out more about this central question, I ended up learning the answers to four simpler questions. These questions became the major sections of my literature review and eventually the major sections of my website. First, *How well do E-Books provide comprehensible input (modelling of new language to facilitate language growth) and what circumstances maximize comprehensible input?* Since I could only find two sources about using E-Books with ELLs, I turned to sources that studied the use of E-Books with other categories of students. The next question I learned about was, *How well do E-Books meet the needs of emergent readers and what factors do teachers need to be aware of when choosing books*
for emergent readers? I also asked, *What E-Book text-tools (special digital features like narration and animations) are helpful and what E-Book text-tools are distracting or detrimental to reading?* Finally, I asked, *What do teachers need to do to maximize the productivity of students’ independent reading?*

**Project Explanation**

Once I conducted the literature review I realized I had compiled information that would be of value to many teachers, especially if I could find a way to share the information is a succinct and friendly way. To do this, I created a website for educators who work with elementary English learners on reading.

**Why I chose a website.** A website fits the content that I have to offer teachers much better than a professional development workshop for three reasons. First, I am discussing online resources so it is very practical and helpful for teachers to simply link to the E-Book websites I am talking about from my own articles. Second, many educators would only need certain resources that I created rather than the entire content of the website. For example, a teacher on a curriculum committee at a school who is considering subscribing to Tumblebooks could read my review of Tumblebooks and not look at the rest of my website if it is not useful to them. Last, by making a website, I was able to include a wealth of information that would be too much for people to absorb in a professional development session.

**Audience of ELL teachers and mainstream elementary teachers.** The audience I intended for this project is mainstream elementary teachers who have ELL students in their classes and ELL teachers. For ELL teachers, they can learn about how
to use E-Books to promote growth in language and vocabulary and develop basic literacy skills.

For mainstream elementary teachers, they can learn how to better manage independent reading time in the classroom, choose books that are developmentally and culturally appropriate for ELLs, and help ELLs and all students become avid readers. I believe that my website could be invaluable for mainstream ELL teachers who are inexperienced in working with ELLs on reading and need some basic information to get started. Two years ago, I received a student in my classroom who had moved from Mexico and attended another school for two months. It turned out his teacher at the other school did not know how to work with him and simply had him sitting and copying the text from picture books into a notebook. I like to think that if that teacher stumbles upon my website, they will learn about some much more effective ways to build literacy with English learners.

Summary of Process

To complete the project, first I researched principles of high-quality web-design by reading Hasan and Abuelrub (2010).

Next, I took content from my literature review and began to condense, simplify, and reword it to be easily digestible for visitors to understand without too much reading. Essentially, I took what I knew from my literature review and created “How To” articles on topics like choosing culturally responsive books and using book talks to promote the love of reading. I also used information from my literature review about what I knew made E-Books effective to conduct reviews of E-Book websites. First, I compiled all the
factors I knew from my literature review make E-Books best for emergent readers, likely to promote comprehensible input, effective in their use of text-tools, and culturally relevant. Then, I used these factors to browse around and take notes on three different E-Book websites. Finally, I turned my notes into reviews.

After researching a few different options, I chose Wordpress as the platform to build my site mainly because I would be able to create a well-organized and professional looking product using it. I posted the articles I had written and began to work on the “site identity”. This entailed choosing a logo, visual theme, title, and tagline.

I created a homepage and index so that visitors can easily figure out what the website is for and find what they need from it. I organized the articles into categories so that if readers like an article, they can easily find related articles.

With feedback from my professor and peers, I made a few changes. For example, I added a form that visitors can fill out to provide feedback and request additional resources that would be helpful to them.

The final step is to advertise the website. When the school year begins in three weeks, I will send out a link to my project to the staff at my school. I also give a presentation on working with English learners to the new teachers in my district every year, so I can show them the website there. I also posted a link to the website in an internet forum for teachers and will post it in two more when I get permissions from the site administrators.

THE PROJECT

Link
The website URL is https://ebooksforells.wordpress.com/.

**Description of Features**

The website has a short and sweet URL. I chose this URL to be easy to remember and intuitive. It has category tabs that make it easy to navigate. It has minimal advertisements and no pop-ups. It has a generally professional appearance because I followed rules laid out by Hasan and Abuelrub (2010) by leaving empty spaces between sections and not using too many colors. It loads quickly and is compatible on different browsers and devices.

**Description of Pages and Articles**

In terms of pages, it features a homepage which states the purpose of the website and provides a complete index of all the articles on the site. It has one article on why E-Books are appropriate for ELLs, five “How To” articles on managing independent reading in class and promoting a culture of avid reading, four “How To” articles on evaluating how well E-Books meet the needs of students, and four articles reviewing popular E-Book websites.

It also has a survey and contact information so that visitors can give me feedback and a list of research references so that they can find out more.

**Example 1: Book talk article.** The screenshot below is from the article I wrote on how to use book talks in the classroom. I choose it because it is a good example of the type of resources I am providing for teachers and the attention to the needs of English learners throughout the site. The blue link at the top links to a video of me giving a book
Book Talk Example

Structure

Most ELL students will need some support to be able to create a book talk. I plan to give students the following sentence frames to guide them:

“*I am going to review a book called _______. It is a _________ (genre).*

The author is ______ and the illustrator is ______.

It is about...

What I like about it is...

I *would recommend it to readers who...*

I *hope you check it out and enjoy it!*

talk example. Below that you can see sentence frames that teachers could use with intermediate English learners to scaffold them giving their own book talks.

**Example 2: E-Book website review.** I am also including this screenshot of the beginning of an article which I wrote as a guide to help educators who are curious about E-Book websites find one that might work well with their students. I added the highlighting to demonstrate how I provide an orientation at the beginning of each article so that visitors can quickly determine if they want to keep reading, connect the article to others I have written in case they want to find out more, and use research from my literature review to support my contentions.
Reviews of E-Book Websites: A Summary

Overview

In previous posts, I have reviewed three popular E-Book websites. I tried to take an in-depth look at how well those websites provided comprehensible input and met the needs of emergent readers and then get a general sense of other strengths and weaknesses for each. If you are considering subscribing to any of the three, I highly recommend you take a look at the individual in-depth reviews. However, if you are doing your preliminary research, I hope this post can more concisely give you the information you need.

Who has the best library of books for English learners?

The amount of great books that a website has in a lot of different areas is believed by Krashen and Bland (2014) to be a critical component of helping English learners learn language through comprehensible input. It is no surprise, that if students are more likely to like what they are reading, they will attend more and ultimately learn more.

References Explanation

I consulted Hasan and Abuelrub (2010) to learn about how to make sure my website is high-quality in content, organization, and display. For the information in the website, I used sources that were already in my capstone literature review, but I used one more when writing the article on managing independent reading in the classroom (Truby, 2018). I also included links to three E-Book websites in my reviews. On the following page, I list all of the references I used in creating the site.
REFERENCES


