Changing Textual Forms and Handheld Hypertext

Definitions of Hypertext and Hyperreading
First, let me offer a few working definitions of "hypertext" and "hyperreading." Often associated with computers and the internet, "hypertext" means that the text contains extensive cross-referencing elements, evocative graphics, various pathways to follow, links to other meanings, and/or parallel displays of information (e.g., Bolter, 1991; Dresang, 1999; Kress, 1998; Landow, 1993; Snyder, 1998). Because there are many ways to read a hypertext, many interpretations, or many pathways to follow, "hyperreading" is when the reader (not the author) decides where to look and how (or whether) to engage in particular aspects of the text (e.g., Burbules, 1998; Dresang, 1999; Hammerberg [Hassett], 2001). The examples of hypertext that I will explore in this article can be found in actual books with actual pages. However, new ways of reading in a traditional medium, like books, can also indicate new ways of reading in the hypertextual environments of computers or the internet.

An Interactive Reading of this Article: Thinking about Comprehension Strategies
Throughout this article, I will be listing some examples of children's books that contain various hypertextual elements. My recommendation for you is to check out some of these books, read them yourself, and think about whether our current ways of teaching reading comprehension are enough to meet the new demands of reading these complex books. When we think about the comprehension strategies we have available in education, there are at least five major groupings that we use to teach children how to get meaning from text:

1. Decoding and reading strategies
2. Mental imagery
3. Summarizing, synthesizing, or retelling
4. Using formulaic comprehension techniques (such as K-W-L or story mapping)
5. Drawing on prior knowledge, social contexts, and scaffolding to construct knowledge

As you look through and read some of the books mentioned in this article, think about what strategies you used to understand your book, which strategies were not enough, and which ones need to be updated. What do you need to notice to understand your book? How do words and images work together? What background knowledge do you need to have? Where do you look in your book? Where do your eyes go? What elements of the text carry meaning? How do you work to understand this book – are you trying to "get" the author's meaning, or is it about "getting" (or creating) something else? What ways of connecting with the text are necessary beyond literal interpretation?

Now of course, the books I highlight throughout the discussion are just a sampling. For many more book titles and descriptions of what we can do as teachers of 21st century digital-aged children, see Eliza Dresang's (1999) book, Radical Change: Books for Youth in a Digital Age.
Changing Textual Forms and Handheld Hypertext

One of the first changes to notice in books for children involves the actual form and structure of the story. Handheld hypertext means that some of the changes we notice on computers or the internet, such as the ability to point and click or choose a pathway to follow, are occurring in actual books with actual pages. Some of these books may be non-linear or non-sequential, in that there is no beginning, middle, or end in the traditional sense of story structure. For example, Macaulay's (1990) book Black and White contains four stories that occur on the page all at the same time. A reader could read one "panel" through the entire book in a linear way, but that would miss the interesting connections among the panels, and the overall intent of the book. In non-linear or non-sequential books, the reader is required to make connections between time slips, multi-layered memories, or multiple storylines. In the end, the reader could reconstruct what happened first, second, or third, but again, this would miss the point about how aspects of our lives and our stories fit together in multiple ways.

Multilayered books or books with many possible places to look achieve the same kind of effect, but often within a linear storyline. For example, the Magic School Bus series (Cole & Degen, 1992) has a lot of information occurring on the page at the same time, all around a similar topic. It is up to the reader to decide where to look and what to read as they gain information in multiple ways.

Sound byte books present information in an encyclopedic way, where the information is presented in pieces or "bytes." The reader here does not have to read page by page or front to back. Instead, you would pick and choose the "byte" to read based on your interests.

In all of these books, the reader makes choices about where to go and what to pay attention to. Often times, these choices take place within a play-like environment: play with words, play with ideas, play with sounds. It takes smart thinking to figure out how to engage with and understand these books, but even very young children are up to the task.

Non-linear / Non-sequential Books
Black and White (Macaulay, 1990)
Whirligig (Fleischman, 1998)
Holes (Sachar, 1998)

Multilayered Books
A Street Called Home (Robinson, 1997)
Digging Up Dinosaurs (Aliki, 1988)
Magic School Bus Series (Cole & Degen, 1992)

Many Possible Ways to Read / Look
Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse (Henkes, 1996)
Out of the Dust (Hesse, 1997)
Madlenka (Sis, 2000)

Sound Byte Books
Throw Your Tooth on the Roof (Beeler, 1998)
I Can't Believe It's History (Arnsteen & Guthrie, 1993)
Material World (Menzel, 1994)

Interactivity / Different Cues for Reading / A Sense of Play
The Stinky Cheese Man (Scieszka & Smith, 1992)
The Book of Rhythms (Hughes, 1954/1995)
Eye Spy (Bourke, 1991)
A Little Pigeon Toad (Gwynne, 1988)

Graphics, Imagery, and Meaning Beyond Words
A second category of hypertextual changes to children's literature involves graphics and images. This occurs when the meaning of the word is expressed in graphics and typeface, above and beyond the letters that make up the word itself. For example, in Feiffer's (1997) book Meanwhile, the word "Raymond" (without quotation marks) is printed across the page in the shape of a megaphone yell. Here, meaning lies in the way the word is printed on the page. There is no need for quotation marks or signifying trailers such as [comma, close quote], Mom yelled. We know that mom is yelling by the way the word is graphically placed. This requires the reader to not only decode the word, but also how the word is printed and placed on the page.

Images and graphics can expand the text's meaning in additional ways, such as in Bing's (2000) rendition of Casey at Bat. The text contains the traditional ballad, but the images and pictures contain information about baseball during that historical time period, thus adding to the poem's overall meaning, extending the meaning placed in print.

Occasionally, images and text blend together in such a way that they can no longer be separated in an effect known as "synergy." Walter & Roeckelein's (1998) book Making Up Megaboy contains an example of synergy in the form of a text written across an attorney's face. The words themselves ramble on in pointless concern, but when expressed across the contours of a distanced face, the image overall demonstrates how no one can explain...
juvenile crimes such as the one depicted in this book. A comprehension test of the literal words in this passage would miss the point, as the printed word means nothing outside of its relation to the face and the overall image. This requires the reader to focus on text, images, and their relation.

In all of these books, the text is no longer the primary carrier of meaning, which means we have to rethink our reading strategies to think beyond print. Again, very young children are up to this task, as they create meaning every day out of the images that surround them.

A Picture Tells a Thousand Words
Lincoln: A Photobiography (Freedman, 1987)
Tuesday (Weisner, 1991)
Alphabet City (Johnson, 1995)
Eye Spy: Mysterious Alphabet (Bourke, 1991)
What Charlie Heard (Gerstein, 2002)

Words Express Meaning through Typesetting
Meanwhile (Feiffer, 1997)
Froggy Gets Dressed (London, 1992)
Flicker Flash (Graham, 1999)
I Love You Stinky Face (McCourt, 1997)
Sweet Corn Poems (Stevenson, 1995)
More, More, More (Williams, 1990)
John Willy and Freddy McGee (Meade, 1998)

Images Expand Meaning
Casey at Bat (Bing, 2000)
The Block (Hughes, 1995)
The Number Devil (Enzensberger, 1997)
I Spy: An Alphabet in Art (Micklethwait, 1991)

Images Contradict Meaning
The Frog Prince Continued (Scieszka & Smith, 1991)
The Stinky Cheese Man (Scieszka & Smith, 1992)

Synergy Between Words and Pictures / Graphics Express Meaning
Making Up Megaboy (Walter & Roeckelein, 1998)
The Middle Passage (Feelings, 1995)

Starry Messenger (Sis, 1996)
Charlie Parker Played Be Bop (Raschka, 1997)

**Multiple Perspectives, Characterization, and Subject Matter**
Lastly, children's books today contain multiple perspectives, multiple voices, complexity of characters, and complicated subject matter. These elements can be considered "hypertextual" because the reader needs to "move outside" the text, drawing on more than a literal interpretation, and interacting with the text through critical conversations. Stories are not tied together under a single unifying perspective or overarching theme. Characters and subject matters are complex and changing, not "dumbed down" for ease of developmental reading levels or leveled vocabulary instruction. The possible book topics reflect diversity, difference, and complex themes, and children are assumed to be capable of making decisions and connections based on different contextual experiences of right and wrong.

Multiple Perspectives / Alternative Perspectives
Making Up Megaboy (Walter & Roeckelein, 1998)
Seedfolks (Fleischman, 1997)
Material World (Menzel, 1994)
Children Just Like Me (Kindersley, 1995)
Stories to Solve: Folktales from Around the World (Sis, 1985)
The True Story of the Three Little Pigs (Scieszka, 1989)

Previously Unheard Voices
The House on Mango Street (Cisneros, 1984)
Yolanda's Genius (Fenner, 1995)
The Alfred Summer (Slepian, 1980)
The Diary of Latoya Hunter (Hunter, 1992)
Shades of Black (Pinkney, 2000)

Subjects Previously Not Addressed
Smoky Night (Bunting, 1994)
The Giver (Lowry, 1994)
Eva (Dickinson, 1988)
Moja Means One and Jambo Means Hello (Feelings, 1971)

Comprehension Instruction and Hypertextual Reading: What This Means
Comprehension instruction in schools today, while good in many ways, misses a number of key elements of hyperreading. The greatest difficulty may be the preservation of the notion
that texts are closed, as if the author or the text has a fixed and singular meaning to "get." With hypertextual books and hyperreading, texts are assumed to be "open," in that the characters, plots, signs, and symbols do not demand a singular interpretation, and they are not "stuck" to a singular meaning. Instead, they are open to many possible interpretations and many possible meanings. In this way, readers are assumed to be "interactive" because the many possible interpretations and meanings come from choosing how to react and interact with the text: which textual aspects to pay attention to, identify with, or explore further. And mostly, children are seen as capable of seeking connections. With all of this in mind, I have a few instructional recommendations:

Acknowledge the "open" characteristics of texts: many ways to read, many choices, many interpretations that take an active reader.

Explicitly demonstrate and talk about how to be an active reader who seeks connections, relates to the text on multiple levels, explores the text, and pays attention to textual aspects beyond decoding print.

Include conversations about the connections and links made in terms of the choices one makes while reading.

Acknowledge that meanings are multiple, changing, and contextual. Include discussions about the multiple answers, multiple perspectives, and multiple interpretations possible.

Head for an awareness of one's own limits in making meaning: a way of situating oneself in relation to the reading, and a way of asking questions about the text.

Update reading strategies and cueing systems to encompass a greater scope.

Print cues: include graphics and the ways that words are printed.

Meaning cues: include textual placement, synergy, and images that represent more than the printed word alone.

Structural cues: include the possibility of mixed genres and dialect cues.

Pragmatic cues: include a purpose for reading beyond deciphering an author's singular meaning.

But mostly, enjoy these books. Part of the joy of hypertextual reading is the talk and play beyond the pages, and the meaning beyond the words.

**Children's Literature Cited**

References


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