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Abstract

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Keywords

reflective, retell, strategy, digital, encourage, responsive, reading

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Full Length Research Paper

Digital retell: A strategy to encourage responsive and reflective reading

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The 'read and retell' strategy has been promoted for some time as a way to support readers in comprehending various genres, language structures within these and interpretation of these as readers capture key information and understandings in written, visual or oral form. Computer-based technologies afford the reader a range of ways to record and reflect upon understandings as new knowledge is shared in multi-modal ways.

Keywords: Digital retell, responsive and reflective reading, computer-based technologies and literacy

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the potential for computer-based technologies for retelling through discussion of an embedded case. Through consideration of how a ten-year-old reader made sense of a range of texts through the strategy 'digital retell' a framework is presented as the following questions are examined:

- How can 'digital retelling' be used to support meaning-making across a range of texts?
- How does 'digital retelling' encourage reflective and responsive reading?

The author also discusses the need to incorporate a range of print and digital genres in reading experiences and the importance of including strategies to encapsulate technology in the literacy classroom.

Digital retell: A strategy to encourage responsive and reflective reading

The complexities of the reading process are undisputable. The reader's ability to first decode the written text, make meaning from it and represent their understandings to others has long been a focus for teachers.

The 'read and retell' strategy requires the reader to first read a text, then retell it in their own words. Preceded by earlier work on *recalling* stories (e.g., Mandler and Johnson, 1977; Morrow, 1985a and 1985b; Stein and Glenn, 1975), 'read and retell' was coined by Brown and

Cambourne, in 1987. The process involves students reflecting upon and analysing a text's: purpose; structure and organization; main ideas; supporting details; author's viewpoint; and intended audience (Honig, 2001; Moss, 2004; Oakley, 2006; Pendergast and Bahr, 2005). Honig (2001) and Mallan (1993) identify that retells can engage children in reading, by positioning them as active, empowered participants in storytelling. Moss (2004) explains that, with experience, students will become comfortable with creating more complex and personal retells.

It is argued that the ability to connect personally to a text enhances reader engagement. Moss (2004) describes that retell strategies provide students with 'the ability to infer beyond the text, summarize, and relate information to his or her own life.' (p.716). Bintz (2000) asserts that reading is too often assessed as an ability to ascertain the *author's* voice, rather than being enriched by the *reader's* voice, or opinion.

There are many reported learning benefits of using 'read and retell', including developing students' ability to interpret key information. The strategy is a way of encouraging reflective reading (Brown and Cambourne, 1987), leading to students experiencing deeper understanding (Hoyt, 1999). As a result, read and retell is often used to support students' reading comprehension (meaning-making), with studies showing it can improve students' understanding of stories (Gambrell et al., 1991; Gambrell et al., 1985). Moss (2004) adds that asking

students to closely examine, and retell, expository texts increases their knowledge of text forms, conventions, and the text construction process. For these reasons, teachers should select texts carefully, ensuring they are accurate, developmentally appropriate, appealing, and congruent with the desired text structure (Mallan, 1993; Moss, 2004).

In addition to being an instructional strategy, read and retell is identified also as an assessment tool. It appears most commonly used to assess students' comprehension of texts (e.g., Bintz, 2000; Honig, 2001; Oakley, 2006). Through retells, teachers can gain information about a student's prior knowledge and its relationship to the new knowledge they encounter (Popplewell and Doty, 2001). Several authors (e.g., Moss, 2004; Oakley, 2006) distinguish 'retellings' from 'summaries', explaining that the former allow teachers to assess *how* students have internalised their learning, in addition to how much information they have retained. Open-ended retelling is argued to be more effective than other comprehension assessments (such as closed questions), as it requires students to engage in more complex processes, whilst demonstrating their personal meaning-making journey (Bintz, 2000). Retells are also an effective way of finding out about children's understanding of language and text structure (Popplewell and Doty, 2001). For example, Mallan's (1993) research provides example of the detailed information that can be gained about these areas from analysing young children's oral retells.

Whilst retelling multiple texts on a particular topic, students compare different media and blend sources of information. Through thorough reading, and careful reorganisation of information, students are able to achieve higher levels of understanding about the topic. However, it becomes imperative that students are provided with avenues to formally reflect on and internalise new knowledge throughout the process to establish firm connections between and among data sources. This is congruent with an inquiry-based approach, which Hill and Mulhearn (2007) found leads to deeper learning. As retelling requires higher-order cognitive skills, several authors suggest that teachers need to both model the process and allow students time to practice, before requiring them to be undertaken individually (Mallan, 1993; Moss, 2004; Oakley, 2006).

Hill and Mulhearn (2007) assert that reading and writing activities need to be expanded to include other modes, such as visuals, sounds and movement. Freebody (2003) similarly defines 'texts' as including all 'communications – visual, graphic and electronic representations of language and objects' (p.174). Using a variety of modes can enhance the process of read and retell, as students need to synthesise multiple sources of information and make complex decisions about how to convey meaning. Pendergast and Bahr (2005) explain that retells 'may be spoken, written, enacted or visual, and ideally the medium should be changed between original text and

retell...' (pp.117-8). The literature provides examples of oral retelling (e.g., Oakley, 2006), as well as written and visual retells (e.g., Black, Brill, Eber and Suomala, 2005). Walsh (2006) identifies that meaning-making occurs in similar ways across written, multimodal and digital texts, but that the way modes are processed is vastly different.

Black et al. (2005) are among many researchers who believe visual texts play an important role in children's meaning-making. They found that providing students with access to pictures and illustrations assisted their comprehension of a narrative. Moss (2004) and Mallan (1993) also report on children's retellings being prompted by visual information. Mallan (1993) summarises that 'Picture telling achieves the best results when it is open-ended; when there is not one right story to be deciphered...The picture becomes the stimulus to their imaginations and not the product of someone else's.' (p.259). The need for students to be able to access written and visual texts is critical to the meaning-making processes.

Affordances of computer-based technologies for retelling

Computer-based technologies afford the reader a range of ways to record and reflect upon information, as understandings are represented in multimodal ways. Walsh (2006) notes that 'there are often multiple 'voices' being presented simultaneously to the reader through the affordances of the digital modes that combine visuals, words and sound.' (p.35). When students construct multimodal digital texts, they play an active part in constructing multiple meanings for interpretation. Marsh (2006) lists the knowledge and skills demonstrated by young children in their construction of digital texts, as including: technical skills; visual skills; understanding of multimodality; understanding of genre; awareness of audience; and critical skills. In addition to providing students scope to effectively demonstrate their learning and metacognitive processes, computer-based technology can assist students' reflective reading skills (Unsworth, 2003, cited in Walsh, Asha and Spranger, 2007). Both Hill and Mulhearn (2007, p.62) and Walsh et al. (2007, p.50) have constructed visual tables, which depict the range of skills needed for reading digital texts.

It is now widely acknowledged that the roles played by teachers and students in literacy classrooms have changed - or, at least, are in need of change - in order to maintain the momentum set about by technological advancements. Teaching and learning requirements have also changed, with it often being asserted that children need to be taught how to read and write digital texts, in addition to print texts (e.g., Moss, 2004; Walsh, 2006; Walsh et al., 2007). Headley (2008) explains: 'In the 21st century, the research designed to improve reading comprehension through writing has moved from merely

putting pen to paper to more technology supported writing aids for comprehension.' (p.214). Moss (2004) adds that the advent of the Internet, and the improvement of informational literature, requires more focus to be given to factual texts. She asserts that students' ability to comprehend informational texts is a necessity for the current technological milieu.

There are various examples in the literature of new technologies being integrated into reflective reading and retelling processes. Black et al. (2005), for example, used written and pictorial retells to ascertain whether providing students with access to texts - through an LCD projector - would improve their comprehension. The results strongly indicate that the projector assisted students in constructing more comprehensive and accurate retells, in addition to dramatically increasing their engagement. Lacina (2007/2008) warns that student achievement and engagement will only be increased if technologies are used to access appropriate literature, rather than repetitive software being utilised. Hill and Mulhearn (2007) achieved increased student engagement through the design of meaningful learning experiences that utilised new technologies. Kraft (2006) asserts that 'digital storytelling' is a meaningful way of integrating technology into the language arts classroom. Her students used cameras and computers to retell the story of the Titanic. However, this was not preceded by students reading texts on the topic. Indeed, there appears to be a dearth of literature about children construction digital texts to retell information from their readings.

Exploring the Potential of Digital Read and Retell

As already described in this paper, there are examples within the literature of how technology can be used to share text throughout the retelling process (e.g., Black et al., 2005). However, there appears minimal exploration of how technology can be used by readers to record and reflect upon text as they engage with retellings or, in other words, how readers *capture* key information in multi-modal ways during read and retell. Whilst some authors have begun to study how students read or navigate digital texts (e.g., Walsh et al., 2007), analysis of students' own constructions of multimodal digital texts also appears less common. The study reported herein will explore how one student constructs a non-linear digital text, utilising a variety of modes of meaning to demonstrate reading comprehension. The aim is to create a reading task, where the student reflects upon what they already know, critically analyses texts, and retells key information. In moving through this process, the student will be encouraged to: identify learning goals; expand their knowledge base; predict and hypothesise; challenge their assumptions; create links between related information; and (ultimately) internalise their learning. The study will outline whether this process might be an

effective instructional and assessment strategy in middle primary classrooms.

Development of this teaching strategy was guided by the following questions:

- How can "digital retelling" be used to support meaning-making across a range of texts?
- How does "digital retelling" encourage reflective and responsive reading?

Initial cues on how to proceed were drawn from Brown and Cambourne's (1987) notion of read and retell (see Table 1) as these were compared and contrasted with affordances of computer-based technologies. The researcher then worked one-on-one with a student to determine procedures that were effective in providing literacy learning opportunities using the digital read and retell strategy.

METHODOLOGY

Taking into consideration MacDonald and Walker's (1977) definition of a case as "the examination of an instance in action" (P. 181), a particularistic, exploratory case approach was adopted. Particularistic cases focus on a particular situation or event and are small in scope and scale (Shaw, 1978). It is also important to note that particularistic cases can suggest to readers what they may do in a similar situation; examine a specific instance that may shed light on a larger problem; and describe an educational innovation that has been applied in contextual detail (Merriam, 1998). One case study is reported. It presents example of how one 10-year-old student (Elise) authored a digital retell.

At the time of inquiry Elise was a 10-year-old child enrolled in Grade 4. She appeared a confident reader and demonstrated she was able to read aloud texts at an appropriate level for her age. However, test scores and teacher questioning revealed her levels of comprehension did not match her outwardly displayed reading ability. She found it difficult to recall key pieces of information she had read and found critical examination of sources challenging. A keen user of technology, the process of digital retell was conceived as a way to support her with these processes. Our equipment consisted of a digital camera, scanner, voice recorder and a computer with presentation software (PowerPoint was selected in this instance).

Data consisted of open-ended interviews with the case study student, reflective researcher notes, print-outs of Digital Retelling throughout the process of construction, field notes, and audio-recordings of sessions. The primary unit of study was a Digital Retelling experience conducted over one hour per week for 5 weeks where the researcher and child began reading and responding to a range of thematic texts, concluding when the student identified the digital retelling was completed.

Following Erickson's (1986) guidelines for case study

Table 1. Examining key components of read and retell strategy

Read and Retell	Digital Read and Retell
The story is the centre of the experience, not the retelling.	The digital text/s are the centre of the experience, not the retelling.
Use suitable props or a flannel board to assist in the retellings.	Software application/s are selected to assist in the retellings.
Concentrate on the beginning, middle and end. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell how the story begins. • Tell what happens in the middle. • Tell what happens at the end. 	Concentrate on the information presented in the digital text. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the text about? • What are the key pieces of information?
Introduce simple story elements first. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell who is the story about. • Tell what happened in the story. • Tell where and when the story took place. 	Introduce contextual information about the text. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who created the text? • For what purpose did they create the text?
Add story grammar terms. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the problem in this story? • How is the problem solved? 	Critically evaluate the text. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the important messages in the text? • What connections can you make between the information presented and the author/s intent?
Engage students in activities to help retell the story. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include the use of a story map to use as a guide in retellings. • Make a time line that retells the story. • Have groups of children draw a picture. • Add the pictures to the appropriate place in the timeline. 	Engage students in activities to help retell the text/s. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a concept mapping software package to record ideas, show connections between and among key points (e.g. Inspiration) • Orally record annotations to be embedded within a presentation (e.g. PowerPoint) • Create a visual annotation of development of key ideas (e.g. ComicLife) • Prepare a nonlinear representation of the different texts and how they fit together to present information (e.g. using "action buttons" in PowerPoint)

analysis and reporting, data sources were recursively examined for three types of descriptive evidence which were combined in case study narratives:

- Particular description – transcript quotes and field note details that describe an event as it occurred in “real time” (Erickson, 1986, p. 151)
- General description -- accompanying explanation that indicates whether quotes or events appear as a unique instance or are representative of a pattern of behaviour
- Interpretive commentary -- researcher narrative that places data within a theoretical or analytical framework and “points the reader to...details that are salient for the author, and to the meaning-interpretations of the author” (Erickson, 1986, p. 152)

Digital Read and Retell in action

To begin the retelling process, Elise identified an interest

in learning more about Africa. Having had her grandmother recently return from vacation there, she was inquisitive to know more about the stories she had heard, photographs she had viewed and gifts she had received. Using a blank slide in PowerPoint, she brainstormed the “information” she knew about Africa (see Figure 1).

At this point it became obvious that Elise’s knowledge about Africa was limited with some obvious inaccuracies. To help gather information about this focus, a range of texts were sourced:

- Images were collected (using Google images), these were compiled and put into a desktop folder;
- A factual print-based text was obtained from the school library;
- Travel brochures were obtained from a local travel agent;
- A letter about sponsorship of an African child was shared by the teacher.

Over the five-week period, Elise engaged with each of

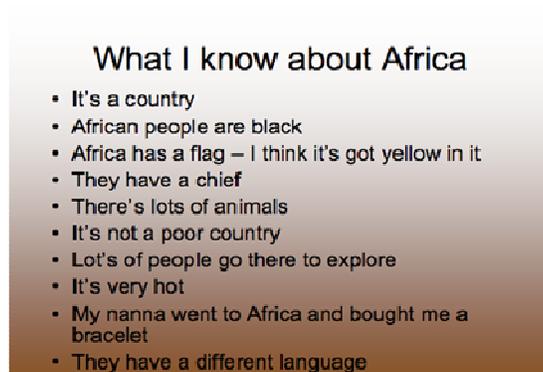


Figure 1. Initial knowledge of identified topic

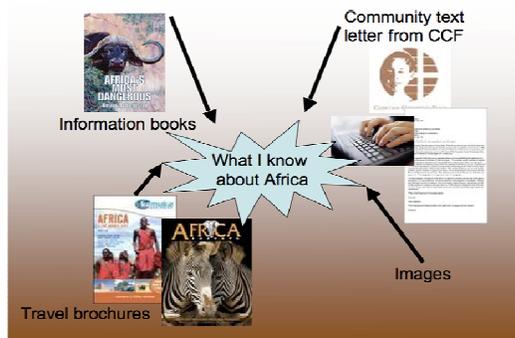


Figure 2. Overview of selected texts

these texts as she authored her digital retelling. She selected the order with which she engaged with the texts and using the retell prompt “make a movie in your mind” Elise represented her understandings of the information presented in each text using PowerPoint. By way of organising the task, Elise created a map in PowerPoint, which identified each text she was examining. In her development of the digital retell, each image of text became a hyperlink, taking the viewer to that retell (see Figure 2).

Throughout the process of digital retell the emphasis was on Elise making connections, identifying patterns and demonstrating comprehension of information. This appeared quite challenging to begin with and Elise demonstrated need for additional scaffolding. She selected the travel brochures as her first texts for examination. To begin the task, Elise engaged with some initial predictions (captured in Table 2).

After these initial predictions, Elise spent some time reading the travel brochures. To support her retelling of this reading experience some questions were presented to her to help articulate connections between authorship and information. Elise used these questions to guide her reading of the texts, and then used them to prepare

verbal annotations of each question. This process is represented in Table 3.

At this point it became evident that while Elise was expanding her knowledge base, she was still drawing upon some stereotypes in her discussion. For Elise, the dominant sources of information in this text were the images. Looking at pictures of animals and some of the more extreme sports represented (captured in the illustrations accompanying safaris) provided much of the information she retained from this source. She does demonstrate understanding of the purpose of the text and the author’s intentions in its creation and dissemination. Relying on this one text alone is insufficient to build a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Drawing upon a collection of 20 images (located through an Internet search), Elise selected four to annotate for inclusion in her digital retell. These are captured in Figure 3. Observations revealed that Elise spent 18 minutes sorting through the images, carefully examining each before making her final selections.

Once she had made her selections, she then examined each image (for an average of 4 minutes each), engaged in some discussion with the researcher and then recorded her thoughts about each for inclusion in her

Table 2. Initial predictions with travel brochures

Transcript excerpt:	Interpretive Comment:
<p>Elise: "I think it's a travel brochure about Africa that will give you information about what you can do there and places where you can sleep. Things that will make you want to go there."</p>	<p>This initial comment reveals that Elise is aware of the genre of a travel brochure and has some understanding of the information that will be contained within.</p>
<p>Researcher: "Who do you think might be interested in looking at this text?" Elise: "People that like hot sun. And people that like exploring different worlds."</p>	<p>Elise demonstrates a sense of audience for the text. Her response does reveal some generalisations that she holds about the content area.</p>
<p>Researcher: "When do you think you might like to look at a travel brochure?" Elise: "When I'm planning a holiday there."</p>	<p>Elise demonstrates awareness of the purpose of the text and when it would be most appropriate to access.</p>

Table 3. Example of Scaffolding

PowerPoint slide:	Transcript of audio captured:
<p style="text-align: center;">Travel brochure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you like about the brochure? • Why do you think people would want to read the brochure? • Why do you think the authors included the information and pictures that they did? • What have you learned about Africa? 	<p>Q1- "What I really liked about the brochures was there were pictures that were really cute of animals and there was ... it showed you everything that you needed to know about it, where you can go, tribes you can go to and stay with. It gives you information about where you can go and what you can do and the animals that are there. And some other interesting things."</p>
	<p>Q2- "I think that umm if you wanted to read about ... a brochure, this brochure about Africa you would want to go there, think about going there for a holiday. And people who like extreme things and love animals would probably really like it."</p>
	<p>Q3- "I think the author wanted it to include the good side of Africa, the positive side of Africa, because it wants people to go there ... because if they saw a picture of someone wanting food they would think I don't want to go there."</p>
	<p>Q4- "I have learned that the pictures ... are what it really looks like and you may not really think that as you're flipping through. But it is really beautiful and I've learned about the history there."</p>

digital retell (see Table 4).

Elise's discussion of Africa begins to include more perspectives and increased awareness of the variety of issues that confront this geographical area and its peoples. The diversity in the images she selected is also representative of her broadening understandings and information sources. She has moved beyond looking only at animals and tourist type activities to consider

some complex social issues.

As Elise continued to move through each set of text/s, her knowledge of Africa continued to broaden. After her engagement with each, she identified what she now knew about Africa. Texts that have not yet been examined in this discussion are represented in Table 5.

Once each of the texts had been examined, Elise was observed to revisit her initial knowledge of Africa and



Figure 3. Image selection

Table 4. Image annotations

Image:	Recorded annotation:
Map of Africa	"I've chosen this picture because I think it represents Africa ... It shows that there are lots of different countries in Africa and that it is a continent."
Giraffes	"I've picked this picture of a giraffe because it shows animals that are there ... and what they look like ..."
People in long line	"I've picked this picture because it is, it shows the Africans have a lot of hardship in their life and sometimes they have to wait for help and it shows what they look like."
Two children	"I chose this picture because it represents that children shouldn't have to work their living. The food that they eat is very poor – they don't just go to a shop and buy whatever they want they have to eat it off what they have."

Table 5. Identified learning from information text and sponsorship letter

Information Text	Sponsorship letter
"I learned that the lion is the largest member of the cat family. There are three different kinds of zebras and giraffes are the world's tallest animal ... I have learned about the animals there and the ... and the range of species there and some other things."	"Africa is a poor country and lots of people die there because they don't have enough food. And some parents die and children are forced to leave school to look after their brothers and sisters that are younger than them."

identify new knowledge. Figure 4 presents one of a series of three slides she prepared to represent her understandings. While she hasn't yet moved to organise her ideas around like themes, she does demonstrate more accurate knowledge that has been informed by multiple sources.

To conclude the process Elise was observed to return to the beginning of her PowerPoint presentation to include a title slide (see Figure 5). The title she selected is interesting in that it uses an example of topic knowledge gained (i.e. safari) and also provides indication of her value of the experience as an opportunity for "learning".

Digital Retelling: A Framework

Analysis of collected data, and consultation of the literature review, resulted in the identification of key aspects of Digital Retelling. The approach consists of four key steps:

1. A theme or topic is identified and children identify knowledge they have about that.

A reader needs to engage with the theme or topic identified for study. The embedded case shared in this paper presents a student-selected topic for investigation. Due to the sustained nature of the task, it is important that the theme or topic identified allows for extended investigation through engagement, time commitments and text selections (Honig, 2001; Mallan, 1993; Moss,

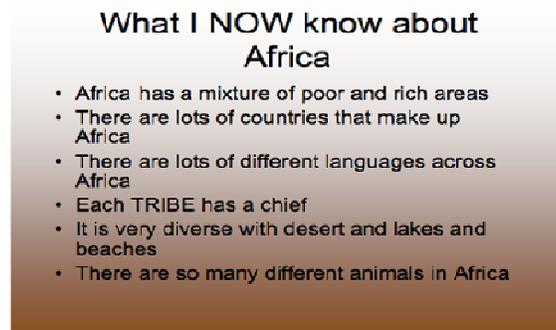


Figure 4. New knowledge

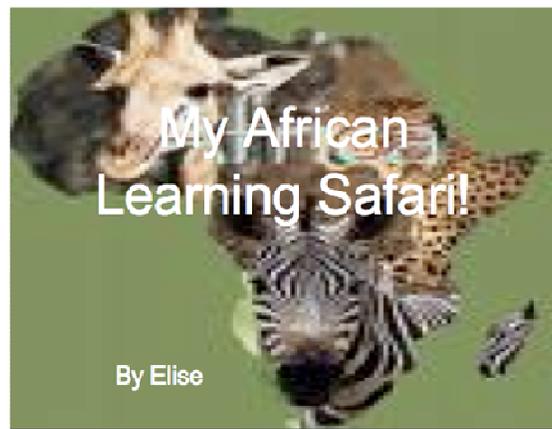


Figure 5. Title slide

2004). Establishing previous knowledge provides a base from which meaning-making on the theme or topic can be expanded.

2. A range of texts (digital and print based) that respond to the theme or topic are selected. The child reads and begins to respond to the texts.

Supporting the reader with a range of different texts enables them to compare and contrast sources to build understanding and comprehension of the theme or topic for investigation (Bintz, 2000; Honig, 2001). In the embedded case the range of digital, print and visual texts engaged with by the reader aided enthusiasm for the task in the first instance, but more importantly enabled the reader to draw upon a range of reading skills and strategies as she decoded the sources, made connections between and among texts, and demonstrated her understanding through her multimodal presentation. Providing a variety of texts can enhance the process of read and retell, as the reader synthesises multiple sources of information and makes complex decisions about how to convey meaning (Hill and Mulhearn, 2007).

3. Using the retell prompt “make a movie in your mind” the child represents their understanding in multimodal ways using computer-based technologies. The emphasis is on the child making connections, identifying patterns and demonstrating comprehension of information. The child might use a software application, create a movie or record an oral account of the experience.

The ability to construct her ‘digital retell’ progressively throughout the task enabled the student to build a holistic picture of her reading experiences as she spent time reflecting and articulating her developing understandings. For each text she was able to reflect upon and analyse the purpose, structure and organization, main ideas, author’s viewpoint and intended audience (Honig, 2001; Moss, 2004; Oakley, 2006; Pendergast and Bahr, 2005). While Elise’s retell sample provides varying degrees of success with this criteria her cumulative development of understanding is evident. For the teacher, the ability to look at the whole product provides opportunity to examine the process the reader went through and their comprehension development throughout the experience.

Opportunities to move between and among print, visual and oral text requires the reader to be able to use the same mediums in the representation of understandings. It is imperative that educators understand that while meaning-making occurs in similar ways across written, multimodal and digital texts, the way modes are processed, or the information that needs to be attended to, is vastly different (Walsh, 2006). In the embedded case, the inclusion of visual information in the retell was open-ended – for example, Elise selected images that complement the meaning afforded by other modes. Kress (2003, cited in Walsh, Asha and Spranger, 2007) explains that the ‘logic of an image is non-linear and non-sequential’ (p.41). For Elise using images as action buttons or hyperlinks in her construction of a multimodal digital text enabled her to demonstrate her various pathways of meaning. Through her use of both written and oral words she was able to further articulate areas of comprehension throughout her reading “safari”.

4. The digital retell is shared.

A sense of audience for the task becomes critical as the reader identifies and articulates key understandings. Awareness of who will look at the ‘digital retell’ and for what purposes guides the reader’s development of ideas and the ways these are represented. Knowing that the process of meaning-making was the focus for this task appeared to provide a scaffold for ongoing representation of understanding. For example, Elise provided examples throughout her ‘digital retell’ that identified developing understanding (‘what I know’, ‘what I now know’) as she worked through each of the texts selected for the task.

CONCLUSION

The ‘read and retell’ strategy supports readers in comprehending various genres, language structures within these and interpretation of these as readers capture key information and understandings in written, visual and/or oral forms. Computer-based technologies afford the reader a range of ways to record and reflect upon understandings as new knowledge is demonstrated in multi-modal ways. It is a strategy that encourages responsive and reflective reading as the child uses technology to represent their developing ability to predict, hypothesise, retell and internalise as they share their expanded knowledge and understandings from a range of information sources.

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