

Audiobooks: The Past Informing the Present

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Abstract

Beginning in 1657 with fantasized mechanical talking books as earrings, audiobooks portray a history of innovation. Initially marketed for the blind, audiobooks have found their way into our mainstream culture. Their evolution has excited a revolution in classrooms. Audiobooks unlock literacy skills by supporting the development of phonological, semantic and pragmatic language systems. Audiobooks model read-aloud attributes. Audiobooks build confidence in the struggling reader. Audiobooks facilitate English learning for second language learners. They are an effective intervention for those with learning disabilities. Audiobooks support shared experiences and extend literacy learning into the home. They provide another dimension for understanding content and encourage both listening and reading. Audiobooks can be used across the curriculum. The use of audiobooks in the classroom lessens student frustration as they allow teachers to differentiate and accommodate different learning abilities and styles. The audiobook has modernized the reader's theater by allowing students to record their own stories and develop an awareness of fluency and prosody of a narrator. Audiobooks can pique a student's interest and motivate all students to read within and outside the classroom.

Introduction

“Literature is my Utopia. Here I am not disenfranchised. No barriers of the senses shuts me out from the sweet, gracious discourse of my book friends. They talk to me without embarrassment or awkwardness” (A&E classroom: Helen Keller—the world I see, 1996).

Helen Keller’s sentiments, implied in her words, describe the frustration felt by many reluctant and struggling readers. Helen, being blind, experienced great frustration in her experiences with reading. Many struggling and reluctant readers experience a “blindness” of their own when they are unable to unlock the written word and know the wonders of reading.

As a 5th grade Literacy Intervention teacher, I have found that reading aloud to hesitant readers who battle with the written word is a successful strategy for instilling a healthy attitude towards reading and creating lifelong readers. Reading aloud pulls the reader into the power of words and expands their vocabulary. In turn, these words convey messages that allow the listener to understand what is being read. Reading comprehension, being the elixir of what it means to read, begins to increase as the listener’s vocabulary increases. Attention spans blossom. The reluctant reader now wants to engage in the written word and uncover the magic of reading.

Reading aloud models fluent reading by engaging the listener in prosody, which defines expressive reading. Prosodic clues are typically absent from that which is written. When hearing the written word these clues promote aspects of meaning for the listener. As well, linguistic features such as sentence structure and features of text such as punctuation are presented.

As I have engaged in the practice of reading aloud to my students, I have noticed an increase in their enthusiasm for self –reading. I have witnessed a growth in their vocabulary and

their reading comprehension. They show more confidence in retelling, making inferences, predicting outcomes and critical thinking.

My exploration of reading aloud to my students has prompted me to take the concept to a different level. I began to ponder and delve into the research regarding the use of audiobooks in my Literacy Intervention class. My experience shows me that audiobooks are a tool for providing the same benefits to my students that I have noted above. Hence, this paper examines this question: Does the use of audiobooks, enable all types of readers to be engaged in reading, promote reading and listening comprehension skills, and increase positive attitudes towards reading?

Literature Review

Context

Talking books have witnessed a lengthy evolution. French novelist, Cyrano de Bergerac in his work, *Comical History of the Stats and Empires of the Moon*, published in 1657, “fantasized about mechanical talking books dangling from one’s ears” (Rubery, 2016, p. 2). Thomas Edison’s tinfoil phonograph of 1877 facilitated the recording and re-playing of the nursery rhyme, *Mary Had A Little Lamb* — considered as one of the first read along aids for children (Cahill & Moore, 2017). By the 1930’s, the talking book found more widespread use as it began to be transferred onto shellac and vinylite records. Caedmon Publishing was one of the first labels to pioneer spoken word recordings of educational literature referred to as talking books.

Audiobooks were initially developed to meet the needs of people with disabilities. Initially, they were marketed to the blind as a way to unlock the benefits of literacy to those who

were unable to read traditional print for themselves. “Disability has always been a driving force behind the technology for recorded books” (Rubery, 2016, p. 35). An increase in the awareness and production of audiobooks prevailed with the Pratt-Smoot Act of 1931, which funded recorded books for the blind. This funding provided services to millions of Americans, resulting in many benefits. The blind no longer needed to depend upon the use of braille. Recorded books outnumbered those available in braille, providing greater access to literature of all genres. Readers were introduced to books above their reading level. They could understand information, perceive feelings, and know the nuances of sarcasm, humor or anger by listening to a voice that took them beyond the inferences of punctuation (Auld, 2005). Listening for understanding led to improved literacy, an eagerness to read, and increased comprehension skills (Jemtegaard, 2005).

In 1932, Robert Irwin, the executive director of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), encouraged the Library of Congress’ Books for the Adult Blind Project to print books for the blind on phonograph records. Subsequently, the AFB introduced the first talking book as an exact copy of the printed book that allowed everyone the opportunity to read. The project was a success and by 1934 the Library of Congress recognized the value of talking books by distributing them to readers. The promise of audiobooks as an educational tool of value was beginning to take shape but the controversy continued.

When the American Foundation for the Blind introduced the first talking book as an exact reproduction of a book in print with improvements, confusion prevailed. The publishing community, sighted readers and the blind wondered if the talking book was a way to read to the blind or a way for the blind to read. The blind, specifically, thought of talking books as reading and not hearing. If that were not the case then that would infer that they were not reading in a

way similar to other people. The talking book's expansion challenged the norm of reading being dedicated to reading print with one's eyes.

Legislators, commercial publishers and the blind felt that the importance of braille was being put aside. The Library of Congress gave assurances that the importance of braille would always be recognized due to the fact that it is used in both reading and writing. They further noted however, that talking books provided access to those who could not read with their fingers, and that they were less physically demanding than using braille. There was a revolution in literacy when individuals could listen to spoken words because it enabled people to read books who could not do so in any other form.

As of 1948 the Caedmon Publishing company became the first to make recordings available to the general population due to long-playing vinyl records which allowed twenty-two minutes of recording per side (Rubery, 2016). This innovation, which deviated from the existing standards, took a novelty to the norm. By 1949, magnetic tape recordings furthered these advancements. Caedmon Publishing, during the 1950's, is credited with establishing the audiobook industry with their publication of an impromptu recording session with the poet, Dylan Thomas (Cheever, 2005). Caedmon Publishing laid the groundwork for the success of talking books. Their success led to the talking book being socially accepted and part of the mainstream culture.

In 1952, the widespread availability of audiobooks led the National Library Service for the Blind and Handicapped to extend their books to children (Rubery, 2016). Harper Columbia was the first to produce audiobooks for all children. In addition, Mort Schindel founded Weston Woods in 1953, "a company dedicated to translating the best in children's picture book literature into audiovisual media" (Cahill & Moore, 2017, p. 23). Listening Library Publishing founded by

Anthony and Helen Ditlow followed the work of Weston Woods with a focus on creating unabridged recordings for children and young adults. The groundwork laid by Cademon Publishing in making audiobooks available to the general public had now taken hold with children being the core audience. Another milestone year for the talking book industry took place in 1975 when Duvall Hecht founded the company Books on Tape (Cheever, 2005). It became one of the world's largest audio publishers. They marketed their product to commuters and busy professionals with little time to read. Audiobooks, due to their portability and availability had become accepted as a medium for anyone, anywhere, anytime. Society had woken up to the presence and prevalence of audiobooks as a personal and educational tool.

The term talking book was replaced with audiobook, a term confirmed as the industry standard in 1994 by the Audio Publishers Association (Audiobook history, 2011). During the 1990's audiobook publishers no longer felt obligated to follow the tradition of staying close to the printed text to imitate the predictable reading experience. Characters and descriptions could be tempered or exaggerated in order to heighten the reader's experience. Learning through audiobooks provided the reader with contextual information, explanations of new words or concepts, and explanations of nuances and pronunciation. As a result, the reader is directed through listening as a fundamental language skill and vital component of oral communication.

By 1994, the company Audiobooks.com became the first to have a website dedicated for the purpose of marketing and selling recorded books. The field expanded rapidly. By the end of the 1990's the majority of audio publishers and major book retailers had websites that included multiple formats for each book. Audiobooks became a medium for all readers. Audiobooks.com initiated allowing individuals to download spoken word recordings onto their personal computers. This negated the use of being dependent upon a reading device and facilitated having

a library of books available on one's smartphone. In 2008, when Amazon purchased Audible, the ability to download audiobooks was solidified making Amazon the industry leader in digital audiobooks (Rubery, 2016).

A successful audiobook includes a narrator suited to the storyline, the printed book itself, distinctive voices, and appropriate pacing and inflection. The narrator's voice quality and characteristics affect the listener's experience (Cardillo et al., 2007). According to Jemtegaard (2005), audiobooks establish characters through the reader's voice. The goal of the narrator is to ensure that the voice used supports the traits of a book's characters. Articulation, expression, phrasing, and utterance are manipulated in order to bring the story to life. These attributes enable an individual to remember and recognize the various characters (Cardillo, Coville, Ditlow, Myrick & Lesesne, 2007).

Autobiographies and memoirs recorded by the authors themselves enhance literacy skills (Cahill & Moore, 2017). Listeners want to hear the actual voice of the author in order to feel a personal connection. This connection motivates and encourages reading. Authors' familiarity with their work facilitates a consistent reading performance and engages the listener so that the listener accurately receives the intended message. This is the essence of listening, which is the underpinning of all verbal communication.

The narration of the printed word into an audio form is not without controversy. Many forms of technology have built-in synthetic voices that are enabled to read aloud the contents on one's screen. Similar technology allows most e-books to be read as an audiobook as well. The use of synthetic voices able to read aloud the contents on a user's computer screen invites the question as to whether or not listeners would prefer a human voice or a computer-generated voice. While technical advances in speech synthesis have made it difficult to detect differences

between the human voice and a digital voice, the human voice adds credibility, which in turn engages the audience (Thompson, 2012). The human voice evokes emotion, which builds rapport with the reader. This emotional bond turns reluctant readers into avid readers.

Sound elements are often incorporated into audiobooks. Music is often the most frequent addition to an audiobook because it adds drama or introduces a chapter (Jemtegaard, 2005).

Music and sound effects heighten the feelings, pace of the story, and facilitate a listener's connection to the story. Music and sound effects make listening much more enjoyable. If used effectively, music and sound can represent words and events in the story and reinforce the text (Cardillo et al., 2007).

The development of the audiobook over time has brought the printed word to all. The results have proven to be profound.

The Benefits

The implementation of audiobooks in the classroom is not without controversy. Some classroom stakeholders believe that listening to an audiobook does not constitute reading. Some go as far as to say it is cheating. This perception holds merit if the objective of reading is to decode. It is important to note that the literacy skills and strategies applied by an audiobook user are comparable to those used by a text user. Wolfson (2008) noted the sole difference being that users substitute the visual understanding of written words with the auditory understanding of written words.

The essence of reading is the development of readers who comprehend the message(s), think analytically about the content, use their imagination, and associate emotionally with the book. Reading is the ability to intellectually process the text and develop an understanding of the

content. The use of audiobooks supports each of these elements, and additionally supports the development of listening skills. From a narrower perspective, reading is a reader's ability to decode letter sequences, along with understanding the grammar, punctuation and vocabulary employed in the text (Simpson, 2006). Reading is also referred to as the mechanical prelude to engaging the content. What really matters is what the reader's mind and imagination does with that content (Varley, 2002).

Reading aloud is acknowledged as an important component of effective reading programs and by some, considered the single most important activity for building knowledge required for reading success (Anderson et al, 1985). Audiobooks develop and improve reading skills in that they mimic reading aloud. The reading process develops through our experiences with oral language thus audiobooks provide opportunities to increase the understanding and appreciation of the written word. Overall, audiobooks support the development of phonological, semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic language systems. Audiobooks provide a consistent, fluent voice that demonstrates proper punctuation and cadence. Audiobooks model effective read-aloud attributes, which are beneficial when the listener is following along with the accompanying text. Reading aloud is an important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in reading.

When students experience the feeling of success and a sense of progress when learning to read fluently, their confidence increases as does reading fluency. Carol Chomsky (1976) conducted a study with three boys and two girls who were eight years old and of normal intelligence. Memorization of a book was used to help these children begin to deal with large amounts of text. Through repeated listening to a tape-recorded storybook while following the text, these students became familiar enough with a book to read it through, either aloud or silently, with complete ease (Chomsky). Memorization of books provided a resemblance of fluency and was

followed by analyzing the text through a variety of language games. Allowing struggling readers to shift their focus from the individual word to connected discourse and to integrate their fragmented knowledge is an important opportunity. The combination of both memorization and exposure to text enables individuals to feel comfortable and relaxed when reading. Struggling readers are willing to invest effort when they recognize success in their reading. This motivation and confidence towards fluent reading is a stepping-stone towards students moving forward on their own. Chomsky (1976) noted, “This, to my mind, was what these children needed the most: the chance to get started that they had missed the first time around” (p. 296).

Emerging and early readers benefit from read-alongs in that they can listen and comprehend literature two to three levels above their actual reading ability (Grover & Hannegan, 2012). Readers develop an understanding that words are read from left to right, words on the page represent the spoken language they are hearing, sentences read with inflection are set apart by capitalization and punctuation and pacing, clarity, pronunciation, and emotion is modeled.

Audiobooks have a positive impact on emergent and early readers. In 2009, Wood, Pillinger, and Jackson conducted an extended analysis of a 2005 study by Wood. The study was conducted to understand the nature and impact of young readers’ literacy interactions with talking books. The literacy interactions used in this study were: bookbinding (demonstration for readers with little or no reading ability), chiming in (similar to bookbinding, but children contribute when they know a word or want to comment), supported reading (attempts to assume responsibility for reading the text most of the time), and fluent reading (fluent readers who work independently and read fluently).

The extended analysis noted different literacy interactions occurring with each type of reading support. Bookbinding was connected with listening and comprehending literature two to

three levels above their actual reading ability (Grover & Hannegan, 2012). Guppy and Huges (1999) noted that bookbinding is an important literacy function in early reading development. It encourages children to develop meaning making skills and gives them the opportunity to discuss the story and develop an understanding of the parts of a story. It is the foundation for future development in phonological and alphabetic awareness (as cited in Wood et al., 2010). Those in the talking books group who engaged in the bookbinding activity demonstrated significantly better improvement in phonological awareness relative to the children in the adult led sessions who were chiming in. This highlights the importance of using talking books with emergent readers.

In a second study in 2000, 16 teachers and 162 first grade students participated in an investigation inquiring into whether increasing access to literature through encouraging re-reading at home was a significant enhancement to the literacy instructional program of second language learners and native English-speaking students. There was a correlation between children's experiences with language and reading at home to their success in learning to read (Koskinen, Blum & Bisson, 2000). Re-reading proposes many benefits as a strategy for enhancing fluency and comprehension while promoting expertise. This approach contributes to an increase in content, knowledge of strategies, and motivation (Blum & Koskinen, 2001). Students who read at home with audiotapes had significantly higher amounts of practice than the students who brought books home. Students noted that audiobooks benefited their practice and helped them learn to read. They reported that audiotapes solved reading problems, made it possible for them to read more difficult material and focus on the meaning of the text. Parents indicated that audiobooks positively impacted their child in relation to reading achievement, interest, and enjoyment. Parents also noticed a heightened interest in reading a variety of books

and reading to family members. Audiotapes facilitated English learning for ESL families.

Teachers indicated that having the audio model at home excited students and raised their interest.

Adolescent struggling readers, while having thoughts, ideas, feelings, and opinions to share, often find it difficult to communicate orally and in written form due to their limited abilities or inability to read. Traditional strategies for reading and listening cannot be the only choice for these adolescents. Beer (1998) established that the use of audiobooks motivated adolescent students, improved their reading skills and comprehension, and encouraged their interest in reading on their own. Audiobooks allow adolescents with weak reading skills to enjoy a positive experience with literature. Audiobooks are not meant to replace the act of reading text. They are designed to provide students with another dimension for developing an understanding of content. The goal is to equip all learners with the skills and strategies needed to monitor their comprehension and construct meaning before, during, and after reading (Wolfeson, 2008).

The importance of providing opportunities for students to gain knowledge and feel successful cannot be understated. When confronted with a reading problem, students often intentionally use re-reading with an audio device to solve a problem. This behavior and effective response positively influences the comprehension of text. According to Aron (1992), "Mature readers who enjoy reading books do not substitute listening for reading. They listen in addition to their reading" (p. 210). Audiobook use develops positive attitudes about reading (Beers, 1998). The audiobook enables older students to become lifelong readers. Frey and Fisher (2006) pointed out that it takes just one good book to hook an adolescent into becoming a reader, and an audiobook could be that one good book (as cited in Cahill & Moore, 2016).

Audiobooks offer an alternative strategy for reaching reluctant or struggling readers. Audiobooks promote vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension as they remove

obstacles encountered by the struggling reader. Byrom (1998) noted that some children need glasses to enable their reading while others may need an audiobook to enable them to read the book. Making these accommodations allows all children to contribute to a stimulating discussion about the content (as cited in Hett, 2012).

The article “Listen” investigated how teachers connect students to reading. For comprehension, some readers need to see and hear words simultaneously. Some are able to connect to reading through listening. Audiobooks can be a scaffold that enables students to read above their actual reading level. Listening to the English language increases vocabulary and comprehension for struggling readers. This allows for increased reading comprehension and reading interest.

Being read to is an essential activity for growing readers to become successful readers. Listening comprehension proficiency in kindergarten and first grade is an indicator of the level of reading comprehension attained by third grade (Beers, 1998). Children being read to are more likely to have a positive attitude toward reading. Growing readers learn about print conventions, vocabulary, plot structures and decoding from being read to. Audiobooks aid the reading experience by encouraging students to ask questions and provide responses.

Audiobooks are a powerful tool for engaging reluctant and/or struggling readers while making the reading process easier and beneficial to their comprehension. In 2012, Grover and Hannegan stated that audiobooks allow struggling readers to gain “skills in recalling details, understanding sequence, making predictions, drawing conclusions, making inferences, and retelling” (p. 10). Through audiobooks, struggling readers gain independence and are given the opportunity to enjoy the same literature experiences as their more proficient peers. Modeling

fluency through an audiobook increases vocabulary and provides time to follow the text without the burden of decoding.

Avid readers enjoy audiobooks because they extend their ability to read for pleasure. They force one to slow down and understand the language, humor, and context in a work of literature to a greater degree. Jemtegaard (2005) stated, “It is fine to enjoy, even to prefer, the voice we hear in our own heads as we read, but limiting ourselves to our own voices means a more narrow experience of literature (as cited in Clark, 2007, p. 49). Extending the experience by reading and listening to a book increases comprehension and vocabulary.

Language arts standards include listening skills as an important aspect in becoming a successful reader and communicator (Grover & Hannigan, 2005). Listening to a story provides learners with an opportunity to enjoy literature at their listening comprehension level. Not all learners have or take the opportunity to develop and strengthen their listening comprehension skills. Listening to audiobooks facilitates the development of listening skills. A literacy skill that does not receive enough attention is the ability to stay with a story until the reader is completely engrossed in it. In fact, Burkey (2009), describes literature read out as “the ability to be immersed in long-form listening” (p.26). Audiobooks provide an opportunity for readers/listeners to become absorbed in long form literature (Burkey, 2009). It is important for readers to realize that by listening to a story they can determine their personal style. Opportunities to listen independently encourages the enjoyment of literature which is critical to literacy development.

Individuals at all reading levels, from emergent to expert reader, benefit from listening to a book. Audiobook elements such as music, sound effects, a skilled narrator and supplemental materials such as author interviews, contribute to the enjoyment of an audiobook. Avid readers

benefit from audiobooks. The slower reading pace facilitates a greater appreciation for the story. Audiobooks allow older students to listen to a book while being involved in other activities. Learners understand that it is not necessary to always read a book conventionally or read by following along with an audiobook. Both methods may prove frustrating and inhibit the experience of becoming immersed in the audiobook storyline.

It is important to facilitate the development of the learner's listening skills just as we recognize a child's reading preference. According to Burkey (2016) "the value of long-form listening and making sense of rhetoric is a vital language art" (p. 27). Audiobooks can bring enjoyment to the learning process and motivate the desire for additional literary experiences.

Larson (2015), observed 26 sixth grade students over 17 class visits. Students were given headphones and a Kindle Fire downloaded with an assortment of e-books and corresponding audiobooks to accommodate a wide range of reading levels and interests. Larson reported that students liked the audiobook's playback speed, allowing students to follow the text more effectively. Amazon's Immersion Reading exemplifies the experience of allowing students to listen to a professional narration while simultaneously reading the highlighted digital text. This allowed students to personalize the reading rate.

Larson's study also proved the importance of audiobook narration. Narration that projected emotions helped these students understand the story to a greater degree. Students believed that they could focus and read for longer periods with audiobook support. This is important to note as struggling readers often become tired easily when reading. The use of a dictionary, enlargement of the font, and the ability to take digital notes also allowed the students to read for longer periods of time. According to Larson (2015) "new literacy perspectives recognize that literacy is persistently evolving and challenging teachers to transform reading

instruction in response to emerging technologies and new possibilities for communication and collaboration within the literacy classroom” (p. 169).

Audio technology is as diverse as the learners it serves. CDs, I-pods, Smart phones, podcasts, and computer audio-based devices support learners by promoting shared reading experiences between children and adults. These technological applications allow the disadvantaged reader to choose a book as a priority rather than avoiding a book. Computers are now equipped to record voice, facilitating the reading and the recording of books. Books are silent on the shelf until readers give them voice. Once that voice is found, worlds of value, imagination, and reason are opened (Skouge, Rao & Boisvert, 2007).

Audio technology can be used in the classroom. Teachers can record a book then share it in the classroom in a variety of ways. During small group sessions, the recording can be played while the teacher turns the pages of the corresponding book. The audio may be paused and repeated in order to engage students in discussion. A student can turn the pages of the book, while the teacher points and orchestrates the discussion. Listening centers allow students to revisit books previously modeled by a teacher. Individual or small groups can listen to the story using headsets facilitating student review of a story. Technology under qualified conditions can serve to build literacy rich contexts for children, in which stories that otherwise would go untold and unread, can be made accessible to children and families (Skouge, Rao & Boisvert, 2007). According to Esteves and Whitten (2011), technology has made the implementation of assisted reading more feasible.

Audiobooks not only improve literacy skills, they also improve attitudes towards reading. Reading comprehension and interest in reading are vital to learning. Reading enables students to obtain new vocabulary. When students struggle with reading comprehension for their grade/age,

they struggle to process new vocabulary and concepts presented in textbooks and other literature. These difficulties often result in students losing interest in reading and having below average reading comprehension skills as adults.

A study conducted by Whittingham, Huffman, Christensen, & McAllister (2013) included the creation of an audiobook club for struggling readers in 4th and 5th grade identified as lacking motivation to read. The number of students scoring in categories below basic and basic decreased, while students scoring proficient and advanced increased. The participants perceived that the use of audiobooks significantly expanded their opportunity to read different types of reading materials. Additionally, the participants believed that using audiobooks increased their choice of reading materials. Participants noted that the use of audiobooks helped them to think for themselves, increased their self-worth, and enhanced their opinion of reading (Whittingham et al, 2013). This demonstrates that the use of audiobooks has a positive impact on struggling readers.

Audiobooks have been used as an effective intervention for students with learning disabilities and with struggling readers (Esteves & Whitten, 2011). Due to the increased quality and availability of audiobooks, the intervention of listening to a fluent model is a viable approach to fluency instruction and an effective tool to improve reading attitudes. Kelli Esteves and Elizabeth Whitten (2001), studied how assisted reading with digital audiobooks and SSR (sustained silent reading) influenced reading fluency and reading attitude. Results demonstrated an increase in reading fluency and improved attitudes towards reading with both groups. According to Carbo (2007), assisted reading gives struggling readers the choice to self-select text, understand storylines, and listen to a fluent model. Assisted reading is a research proven method for improving fluency.

It is imperative for struggling readers to have access to audiobooks beyond the Language Arts classroom. Audiobooks enable struggling readers to access grade level content throughout all content areas. Audiobooks can be used during read-alouds, to reinforce key concepts, to make subjects they find difficult easier to understand, to help build background knowledge, or to develop and strengthen academic independence. Students are able to delve deeper into complicated topics and listen to better-quality books than they might find at their own level (Lerner, 2013). When students are able to listen while they read along, they are provided with a multisensory experience. This can help lessen the frustration for students who have difficulty understanding text materials. The ability for students to comprehend a textbook and participate in a class discussion is important to a student's confidence and ability to demonstrate mastery of the objectives taught. According to Mary Beth Crosby Carroll, a reading specialist at The Children's School in Brooklyn, NY, following along visually while listening can enhance work-recognition ability, while listening alone can expand vocabulary. Both of these skills are important for struggling students when learning curriculum across all content areas (as cited in Lerner, 2013). This exposure strengthens comprehension skills, particularly for children who are struggling readers.

Implications

Based on the extensive empirical, theoretical and practical literary evidence, it is clear that using audiobooks in the K-12 setting will provide incredible benefits to advantaged, disadvantaged and language learners alike. What follows includes suggestions for implementing audio books.

The love of reading can help students throughout their lives. However, students who do not engage with books miss out not just in entertainment, but also on building their comprehension skills (Myrick, 2014). Making pictures in their heads from the words on a page becomes more possible if they first begin with the words in their ears (Webber, 2016). That image takes shape through the help of proficient narrators who convey much through their tone, accents, and phrasing. Audiobooks help kindle the imagination and motivate listening and reading.

Audiobooks can be used across the curriculum. Listening to nonfiction and fiction on audio can be a great way to pique the interest of students who may not be as familiar with the content (Cox, 2009). Playing audiobooks in the classroom can also help illustrate key characteristics of nonfiction, such as the use of relevant details and domain-specific vocabulary (Myrick, 2014). Hearing the concept may make it resonate better than seeing it in print. When students are able to listen while they read along, teachers are providing them with a multisensory experience (Webber, 2016). Audiobooks can help lessen the frustration for students who have a hard time understanding text materials.

Audio books can be used in a variety of settings: whole class instruction, small group instruction, individual instruction, or learning centers (We Are Teachers Staff, 2013). Allowing time for students who struggle with print to preview an audiobook before whole group instruction is a positive accommodation for their confidence and reading comprehension. During whole class instruction, students may listen and follow along with their book. After listening, it is important to encourage students to discuss and analyze what they have read, deepening their reading comprehension skills. Small groups allow students to play and then replay audiobooks

during small group instruction to reinforce key concepts. After students listen, they should discuss the audio excerpt to ensure comprehension. Audiobooks may be used for independent reading by students who struggle with print. Giving students the opportunity to try out the audio samples for independent reading during downtime reinforces what they've learned in class. When students choose what they want to read, they are more likely to enjoy reading and will become more confident with assigned reading (Webber, 2016).

Learning centers can be created in an area in the classroom where students have access to the audio books. Teachers can create a listening station with art supplies, small toys or other objects to encourage students to draw or act out what they are hearing. Through an audiobook or printed text, it is beneficial for students to write or illustrate responses to their reading. This allows students to share their work with others and discover something other students have included or omitted. Audiobooks and multisensory learning reinforce listening and reading comprehension.

When students listen to books read aloud multiple times, it can increase their reading fluency. Providing students with the opportunity to read and re-read the same audio book allows for an increase in fluency and builds student's vocabulary (Parlett, 2016). Stories come to life when read aloud, and as listeners we can see the characters and situations in new ways (We Are Teachers Staff, 2013). Fluency can be described, but nothing illustrates the concept more vividly than the animation a professional narrator brings to an audio recording.

Students may gain fluency knowledge and expertise by listening to a professional audio recording. This opportunity gives students a positive example of reading fluency, expression, and emotion, thereby challenging students to employ the same criteria as they read aloud

themselves. Listening to stories and reading aloud go together (Cox, 2009). After students have become familiar with professional audiobooks, teachers should challenge them to make their own audiobooks. Students may record themselves reading a short book, a poem, or their favorite part of a book. If working with a longer book, students can be assigned a different section to read, and then connect the audio clips together to create one reading of the book (Parlett, 2016). The use of an iPod or smartphone as a simple recording device may be used or a program such as iMovie to capture a full-blown filmed version of the tale (Webber, 2016). This activity produces the same positive benefits as a reader's theatre. Students enjoy hearing themselves and they can judge whether or not they were reading fluently. When students produce their own audiobooks it enables them to close the gap between fluency and comprehension thus developing students' understanding that stories are both art and a means of communication (We Are Teachers Staff, 2013).

Audiobooks help students who struggle with understanding what they are reading. To help build reading comprehension, students may retell the story after they have listened to it. As well, students can be given specific questions to listen for so they are reading and listening for a purpose. Audiobooks allow everyone to participate in the experience by enjoying the characters, understanding the challenging vocabulary, and appreciating the creative setting (Myrick, 2014). Exposing all students to intricate storytelling, no matter their reading level, is an important benefit of using audiobooks in the classroom (Cox, 2009).

Audiobooks can build students' critical thinking and listening comprehension skills. Giving students a specific task before listening to a book, then having them complete the task during or after they have finished is an example of using critical thinking and listening

comprehension skills together (Webber, 2016). This can be done by having students use a graphic organizer to fill out and record their thoughts. Students may then summarize what they have listened to and retell it to a friend. Part of the fun of listening to a story is the magic the reader brings to the performance. Stories come to life when read aloud, and as listeners, students can see the characters and situations in new ways. As stated by Parlett (2016), students' listening comprehension is typically beyond what they understand in print. Audiobooks allow students to read above their reading ability.

Students do not have to listen to an entire recording in order to obtain the benefits of audiobooks in the classroom. Just a few minutes is often enough to introduce students to a new genre, author or literary technique. Teachers may have their students listen only long enough to pique their interest in a story, or select parts to heighten the suspense. A teacher can play an audiobook clip from the middle rather than the beginning of a story (Parlett, 2016). The excitement may encourage students to pick up the book on their own. Finally, teachers may have their students listen to an audiobook to demonstrate the book being read with fluency. This aids students with difficult pronunciations or unfamiliar words. When a teacher is able to heighten the interest of a new listener, it is an opportunity to allow the individual to continue independently with the audiobook (Webber, 2016). The most fulfilling moment is when a child asks if there are more books like the audiobook they just finished.

In a large class setting with different learning styles and capabilities, audiobooks can help bridge the gap and keep students engaged in meaningful learning experiences. Students learn in different ways and are at different stages in their education (Myrick, 2014). The use of audiobooks enables small group work in a large classroom. Students listen to an audio version of the book without confusion, off-task behavior, or mispronunciation (Cox, 2009). Audiobooks

used in small groups may also be used to challenge advanced learners who may be ready for a new book sooner than their classmates.

Listening to an audiobook as a family can be a powerful shared experience, especially for students who don't necessarily come from a print-rich environment. The recording can serve as a model for reading aloud for parents and offer opportunities for discussion and reflection as a family (Webber, 2016). Teachers may send home an audiobook downloaded on an iPod or a Kindle, with accompanying discussion questions and a journal for reflection. These activities enhance the home to school connection.

Many ESL teachers find that starting their class with a listening exercise motivates students to listen to the nuances of language (Nash, 2016). Using an audiobook excerpt and exercise is a positive way to do this. Depending on their level, students can feel overwhelmed or lost if the audio is too fast or too colloquial (Myrick, 2014). When using audiobooks, one of the best ways to ensure success is to provide the printed text of the audio (Webber, 2016). Students will be able to listen to the story and see the words at the same time, providing a new level of understanding and reachable success. It is imperative when using audiobooks, to check for understanding, and if necessary repeat sections. The goal of an audiobook for ESL students is to hear and comprehend the story. According to Nash (2016), listening and reading at the same time can increase a student's vocabulary and build confidence, helping to gain English fluency.

Audiobooks allow students to feel accomplished and talk about books that their friends are reading. This sense of accomplishment paired with a quality, appealing audiobook can instill the desire and love for reading in students that will last beyond the classroom.

Significance

Short term training and long term professional development are requisites for the implementation of a classroom innovation such as audiobooks. Evidence based training is a transformational process that requires building knowledge and skills that lead to attitudinal changes. Changes in attitude lead to systemic and long-term acceptance of an innovation, with the goal being student achievement. Hence, what follows are recommendations for school districts, classroom teachers, and recommendations for parents/caregivers.

At the District level, needs to be addressed to support evidence-based implementation of audio books include the allocation of human resources, grant structures, and budget considerations. The implementation of audiobooks requires specific and sustained budgetary allocations in order to support technological needs. A model for system training requires asking who will be trained, what will be learned and how will new learning be evaluated. Training must be provided for all classroom stakeholders; classroom teachers, support staff, administrators and parents. Such training must be specific to the needs of the group. For institutional leaders the training focuses on their support and advocacy. They are to understand their role in being an advocate, deferring criticism and listening to the needs of reluctant stakeholders. Their training focuses on their leading by example and creating an environment that makes experimentation, questioning, failure and celebrating success part of the learning journey.

Training for teachers focuses on examining the theory and evidence based research behind audiobooks. Taking the theory and putting it into practice requires providing teachers with ideas on ways to incorporate audiobooks into the classroom for a target audience (CLD., struggling/reluctant readers) they have identified. Establishing model classrooms that teachers

may visit allows teachers to visualize then actualize the implementation of audiobooks. At this stage of the implementation, teacher training includes information related to the different platforms for listening to an audiobook and the technology involved in each form (iPad, Kindle, computer, Smartboard, and online programs, Learning Ally). Teachers must then be given time to personalize their instructional techniques and strategies using audiobooks. This classroom practice is followed by self-evaluation and/or opportunities for teachers to share their efforts with their peers. Such review provides training opportunities for determining new goals for the group and for individuals. Regular meetings and long term teacher study groups provide motivation and allows for opportunities to review goals, share new learning and determine long term professional development opportunities.

The school-home connection when implementing audiobooks is necessary in order to reinforce the school experience. Teachers can support this dynamic by keeping parents abreast of the variety of audiobook platforms and resources available. School programs such as; Raz Kids offer a school subscription service which allows students to listen to books, follow along and complete comprehension questions. Students are incentivized to read as their reading is rewarded with points which may be used to build rocket ships and robots. Such a program introduces audiobooks to families and students outside the school environment. Teachers may promote the public library as a free resource for obtaining audiobooks. Through the library, audiobooks are available online and /or through personal visits. Providing information to parents regarding online programs such as Learning Ally provides an additional learning resource for students with an educational plan. Additionally, teachers can record stories on a CD which in turn can be shared at home with an accompanying story, a similar approach as a “book in a bag.”

This is an inexpensive method for sharing the love of reading as a family and respects the reading abilities of all.

Amazon is a leading audiobook company that offers Family Library Sharing. This facilitates sharing Audible books among household members. Audible and Kindle are family resources which encourage children to read and listen. Google Play is an additional resource for family audiobook use. Google Play offers audiobooks for listening on a Google Home speaker or phone. It is commitment-phobia-friendly, and allows listeners to buy individual books without a subscription. Google notes that in the Family Library, books may be shared at no cost and bookmarking one's place in a book is available across devices. Each of these resources compliments the use of audiobooks in the classroom by extending this experience to the home.

Conclusion

“Audiobooks are for people who can't read and for people who can't read enough. They are for people who are busy doing other things. They are for people who hang on every word. They are for people who want books to be more like the movies. They are for bookish people. Audiobooks are for those of us who hate reading. Audiobooks are for those of us who love reading” (Rubery, 2016, p. 276).

Audiobooks have and will continue to inform instructional practices. Their implementation in the classroom and their use at home adds another dimension to the challenge of unlocking the world of reading. Audiobooks permit students to: comprehend the typical structures of narrative, identify the underlying construction of written language, increase their vocabulary, develop their general knowledge of the world, enrich their understanding of story structure, written language conventions, vocabulary, and features of their own culture.

My experiences and research show that audiobooks are a tool for providing the same benefits to my students that I have noted above, thus, supporting the value of using audiobooks in the classroom/home and enabling all types of readers to be engaged in reading. Audiobooks promote reading and listening comprehension skills, and increase positive attitudes towards reading. They facilitate reading anytime, anywhere.

Audiobooks allow students to gain insight into the personal understanding that reading is an enjoyable activity. Audiobooks are for individuals of all ages and abilities (Casbergue & Harris, 1996). They do not discriminate.

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