Rumpelstiltskin in Traditional and New Digital Media

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The paper documents 10 months of work focusing on the process of creating a children's book which develops new ways to utilise digital media alongside traditional methods and techniques such as mark making, drawing, painting and collage. The work aims to promote and develop language and literacy development within an innovative contemporary illustration context.

The work makes use of research into specific learning methods (such as cloze procedure, semantic and syntactic evaluation, word identification and phonics) and embeds them within a traditional fairytale narrative. The aim of the book is to stimulate and motivate learners through use of tested learning methods alongside inventive use of illustration, layout and letterforms.

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INTRODUCTION

This project was begun in May 2004 and what follows is a sequential record of the ongoing exploration, research, questioning, analysis and development of an experimental children's book. The book is a re-telling of the brother's Grimm story 'Rumpelstiltskin'. The story includes diverse elements, themes and characters of good/bad, comfort/fear, imagination/reality. It allowed me to create imaginary landscapes, characters and creatures which deal with key themes of love, fear and friendship and to develop experimental imagery and letterforms to support and reinforce tested learning and teaching methods.

CONTEXT

My experience is primarily in illustration, multimedia and animation. My most recent work uses traditional and digital media. I hope to develop work for children's books which expresses ideas related to imaginary worlds. My main interests are communicating ideas via drawing and painting methods alongside digital techniques such as video, animation and computer manipulation.

The structure and focus of this work is driven by two strands. Firstly exploration of traditional and digital illustration methods and secondly research into language and literacy learning and teaching methods [7]. In the work, I experiment with integration of imagery and letterforms in a contemporary children's book context. I hope to create work which will excite and enthuse readers and will also contribute to their language and literacy acquisition [5]. Exploration of how children learn plays a key role in the development of the book's structure [8]. The aim is to motivate children to learn via enjoyable and fun activities. Friedrich Froebel's pedagogy of 'education through play' has provided me with useful ideas on the use of creative activity in the learning process [13]. In this book project, I am exploring ways of integrating learning methods such as 'cloze' exercises [16] and cryptograms. The pedagogy of phonics, oral language and concepts of print provide a learning focus within a contemporary design and illustration context.

EXPRESSIVE LETTERFORMS/VISUAL CLUES

The communication of key concepts and ideas via hand rendered words and images is not a new idea. The Beggarstaffs designed posters in 1895 using collaged imagery and lettering which 'challenged the viewer to participate by deciphering the subject' [15]. Jim Davies describes how US masters such as

Paul Rand and Saul Bass were hand rendering type decades ago [6]. More recently, Lucy Cousins creates hand painted letterforms in keeping with her bold illustrations [4]. The use of script writing, colour and texture in Marc Boutavant's work add to the 'visual experience' [11] but may be difficult for children to read.

I am currently experimenting with lettering which is functional, visually appealing and fully integrated with the book's imagery [1].

Figure 1: Sketchbook rough

Biro lettering.

Figure 2: List of names

The yellow background represents paper given to the Queen, with a list of names gathered by the animals. The letters should be legible but integrated into imagery.

Figure 3: Guess?

Asking questions throughout the narrative attempts to engage children in what is going on in an interactive way.

Figure 4: Rumpelstiltskin

In this example I have used segmentation to encourage learners to distinguish parts of a new word or name.

In this project it is important that the lettering is legible and aids children's comprehension [18]. Visual clues used in the work need to excite readers and motivate them to decipher the text.

Figure 5: Cryptogram

Jumbled letters of name. Readers are prompted to decode/decipher words.

Figure 6: Love, lovely

Using visual clues to help readers make sense of the narrative-hearts, flowers and colour associated with love and lovely. Combining signs, symbols and lettering helps to communicate aspects of the story.

I use scratched, scrawled, wobbly, naïve images and letterforms to aid comprehension throughout the book.

Figure 7: More!

Combining of a range of letterforms, symbols and imagery as new words and concepts are introduced helps build learners confidence.

Figure 8: Find text

This text uses colour, texture and scale to emphasise key words in the narrative. The black background provides contrast and draws attention to individual letters.

Repetition of expressive lettering, symbols and images are designed to aid visual recognition and comprehension. I will also provide opportunities for children to use phonics to make sense of the narrative.

Using concepts of cloze procedure, I am experimenting further with omitting key words, underlining, symbolising and emphasising others to extend opportunities for learning. Text, sentence and word list activities such as use of word shapes and multiple choice encourage children to interact with the narrative in-order to decode language.

Cloze procedure can help develop skills in oral reading and silent reading as well as promoting fluency, comprehension and spelling. Examples shown above show use of cryptograms, repetition, imagery, signs and symbols to give a range of visual clues to learners [9].

The book seeks to encourage children to play with and enjoy the narrative and targets children acquiring language and literacy at Key Stages 1 and 2, ESL (English as a second language) [4].

Adjustment, development and refinement of the project is a work in progress. I hope to make a cohesive book incorporating experimental use of visuals, lettering and learning methods. A printed prototype will be used to gather feedback from a range of sources including typographers, designers, publishers, children and language and literacy staff.

Figure 9: Rumpelstiltskin appears

Beginning to integrate letterforms and imagery in double page layout.

Figure 10: Suddenly text

Using arrow symbol, underline and outline to highlight specific words.

Figure 12: King and palace

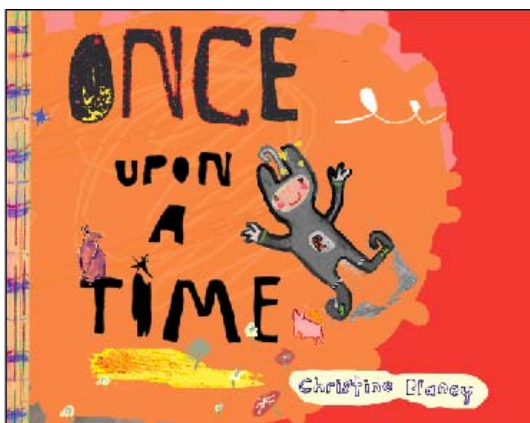**Labels help the reader to recognise, visualise and remember new words.**

Figure 11: Cover rough

INFORMATION AND QUESTIONS

The work is concerned with exploration of the role of contemporary illustration (traditional and digital) as a motivational tool in language and literacy education. What is the future role of digital/traditional illustration and animation in children's book publishing? Can contemporary imaging and lettering methods and techniques, alongside tested educational methods, provide enhanced learning opportunities?

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