An Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review of:

Audiobooks and Education

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Have, I., & Pedersen, B. S. (2019). The audiobook circuit in digital publishing: Voicing the silent revolution.*New Media & Society,* 146144481986340-Have, I & Pedersen, B S 2019, ' The audiobook circuit in digital publishing: Voicing the silent revolution ' , New Media & Society, pp. 1.

In this article, the researchers examined how audiobooks have significantly changed the digital publishing industry. Sales over the last decade have been steadily rising and the print industry has now taken notice. Audio books have significantly disrupted the book publishing industry and is a huge success for digital publishing. Have and Pedersen used qualitative methods to re-examine the model created by Ray Murray and Squires on the audio book circuit. Have and Pederson argue that, “readers are not just readers; they are listeners and users of electronic devices through different sensorial outputs and in a number of new contexts” (Have et al, 2019, p. 13 and 14). Sound and smartphones are considered as a key component of Have and Pederson’s model. Audiobooks have opened new doors for publishers and are becoming a key part of helping individuals read in their everyday lives. Despite audio books establishing itself, it is still reliant on book publishers, authors, bookstores, libraries and other established book institutions. Audio books are not only challenging our cultural norms but renegotiating the reading industry in front of our very eyes.

Hartell, A. W. (2018). *Audio books' impact on students' reading experiences*(Order No. 10974681). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2185951593).

This study examined the impact of audiobooks on the reading experiences of young students in a public elementary school in rural upstate South Carolina. The study tried to address the low motivation and engagement amongst students during independent reading in the classroom. Hartell selected the grade five class because for three years prior, these students had lower than expected achievement data and apathy was extremely high according to the grade five teachers (Hartell, A.W., 2018, p. 96). These grade five students were also proficient with mobile devices which would make it easier to teach them how to use the audio books. This qualitative study relied on a focus group, interviews, a survey and classroom observations to collect and analyze the data before, during and after the introduction of the audio books. Adult support, access, interest, focus and difficulty were themes that influenced the data. Hartell found that audiobooks might be indifference in terms of student’s interest, but they can have a positive impact on the reading experiences of students.

Hartell found that in order to increase student’s interest in reading, reading needs to, “be informative and engaging for students, the student must be engaged in the act of reading” (Hartell, A.W., 2018, p. 95). Hartell also argues that student’s interest in reading decreases due to social economic status.

At the conclusion of Hartell’s observations in the elementary school, she found that most students had positive experiences with the audiobooks and would continue to use their audiobooks in middle school. Students were able to focus more due to having headphones or earbuds to block out distractions and they found reading was much easier. However, a lack of technology was a hinderance for the students because they were unable to read their audiobooks at home. Students also indicated that interest still mattered when reading an audiobook and they were more engaged when the book hooked them in.

Majority of the teachers noticed increase motivation amongst the audiobook students especially amongst struggling students. However, teachers questioned the sustainability of the effect of audiobooks and wondered if students were only interested because the audiobook was a “novelty” (Hartell, A.W., 2018, p. 100). Some of these teachers used it as a reward rather than embedding the audiobook into their practice and showed that teachers did not embrace the potential of the audiobook in Hartell’s eyes. Hartell felt that further professional development for teachers in incorporating the audiobooks into their teaching practice and the school providing more supports for families at home would improve the potential of young readers enjoying reading.

Irwin, W. (2009). Reading Audio Books. *Philosophy and Literature* *33*(2), 358-368.

Irwin identified that one of the reasons why people read less today is simply because, “reading silently is not social” (Irwin, W. 2009, p. 358). People are constantly multi tasking and audio reading is convenient. While audiobooks were cumbersome in the past, Irwin noticed that audiobooks were becoming easily accessible in CD and MP3 formats. Irwin noted that fiction audiobooks are like listening to a “one-man play” (Irwin, W. 2009, p. 359). Hearing books out loud, Irwin questions Harold Bloom, Sterling Professor of Humanities at Yale University, and other critics because audiobooks, “reconnects us with the long tradition of oral performance in Western literature” (Irwin, W. 2009, p. 359). Irwin further argues that by listening to text are we not in a better position to, comprehend, appreciate and critique” (Irwin, W. 2009, p. 360.)

Irwin laments that a more comprehensive study between print and audiobooks is needed to analyze whether listening is just as effective as reading comprehension. Despite the lack of studies prior to 2009, Irwin is aware that audiobooks are not suitable for all individuals and is contingent on whether individuals prefer listening or not.

Irwin also believes that good listening is active and that audiobooks still provide the listener the opportunity to, “interpret themes and ideas in quite the same way the silent reader is (Irwin, W. 2009, p. 363). However, Irwin notices that novels that are narrative driven can be interpreted in different ways due to the individuals reading the novel in the audiobook. The industry will need effective directors and producers to ensure that the authors intent or voice is heard in the audiobook.

Knauf, H. (2016) Reading, listening and feeling: audio feedback as a component of an inclusive learning culture at universities, Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 41:3, 442-449.

This German study examined the impact that audio feedback would have on university students. The conclusion of the study illustrated that students in a higher learning environment are open to audio feedback. The study found that students were situated in two groups. One group showed that students preferred auditory feedback. The other group preferred written feedback. However, both groups perceive audio feedback as personal, while a written form is viewed as “more businesslike and matter-of-fact” (Knauf, 2016, p. 447). What the students were essentially saying was that audio feedback from their teachers allows students to, “feel some individual and personal connection with their teachers” (Knauf, 2016, p.448). However, Knauf reminds us that an overreliance on auditory should not be the only form of feedback, but that the auditory feedback can provide opportunities for universities to be more inclusive.

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated

Larson, L. (2015). E-BOOKS AND AUDIOBOOKS: Extending the Digital Reading Experience. *The Reading Teacher,* *69*(2), 169-177.

Larson had the opportunity to visit Mr. Clark’s sixth grade classroom which was near her university. She spent some time with the class as they combined e-books and audiobooks reading experience using Kindle Fires (Larson, L. 2015. p.169). Twenty-six students had the option of using their e-books or audiobooks to read *Moon over Manifest, Number of Stars,* or *Holes.* Through the six-week observation, Larson noticed, “tremendous excitement and growing confidence as they engaged in digital reading and implemented student-centered instructional approaches” (Larson, L. 2015, p. 176). Student customized their devices to accommodate their own needs and enhanced their learning. Larson found that digital readers can, “encompass a range of formats such as interactive or hyperlinked texts, animations, and audio (Larson, L. 2015, p. 176).

The reading and listening experience provided these students with the opportunity to adjust their reading rates and tackle words that were unfamiliar or difficult. Listening also, “improved their reading stamina, enabling them to read more and for longer periods of time” (Larson, L. 2015, p. 176.) Larson argues that it is up to educators to provide environments that would allow technology to help enhance the learning experience for students in a collaborative setting. Larson wanted educators to consider technology that can support reading, provide e-books or audiobooks that are appropriate for your students, provide the necessary objectives and guidelines for the students and model how to effectively use the e-book or audiobook for your students. As Mr. Clark mentioned that the activity was a “win-win situation” because his students took ownership of their own learning.

Liu, H et al. (2019). An experimental comparison on reading comprehension effect of visual, audio and dual channels. *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology.* 56 (1). 716-718.

Audiobooks are booming in the modern mobile age and according to “Global Audiobook Trends and Statistics (2018), audio-book performed better than e-book, and US has occupied the largest market share, and the sales reached 21 billion dollars in 2016 and 23.5 billion dollars in 2017 (Liu et al. 2019. 716). Lui et al reference Mayer’s 2005 study and argue that the “learning effect of dual channel combining visual and audio channel is better than the effect of single channel (Liu et al. 2019. 716). The researchers used a short novel titled PIERROT. They then handed out mobile phones and headphones to 42 subjects in the study. They were divided up into 3 groups that consisted of 14 participants. They give the instructions, procedures and time limits. They were also told to complete a questionnaire. The results provided that it is, “consistent with previous research result that the memory efficiency of audio channels is better than that of visual channel” (Liu et al. 2019. 717). The researchers also found that dual channel promotes memorization in terms of knowledge and understanding amongst the reader.

Moran, K. (2017, October 30). 7 Ways Audiobooks Benefit Students Who Struggle with Reading. Retrieved from <https://www.weareteachers.com/audiobooks-benefit-students/>.

Audiobooks allow students to hear explicit sounds of letters and letter patterns that form words. Audiobooks also help students engage in text and gain exposure to more words, ultimately improving vocabulary, comprehension and critical thinking skills. Audiobooks increase word exposure and vocabulary and builds background knowledge. Audiobooks also reduces working memory deficit and remove printed word decoding anxiety. It also increases comprehension and develops grade level appropriate knowledge. Finally, it gives students educational independence.

Tattersall Wallin, E., & Nolin, J. (2019). Time to read: Exploring the timespaces of subscription-based audiobooks.*New Media & Society.*

In the article, the researchers noticed that the interest in subscription-based audiobooks was rising in popularity especially in the Swedish market. The researchers conducted the study in Sweden and found that reading by listening is a common way of reading. They gathered their empirical data from BookBeat, a subscription service for audio reading. The findings in the study found that a larger portion of subscribers often read during the workday and that reading patterns were similar between the daytime and week time. However, younger people often read more during the summer months. No gender read more than the other according to the researcher’s findings. What they did find was that on average, individuals averaged between 90-100 minutes on BookBeat of reading with audiobooks. This led to the researchers developing three modes of reading. There is stationary reading, mobile reading and stationary/mobile reading. The stationary reading is sitting and reading a book or e-book. Mobile reading is defined as reading by listening. Stationary or mobile reading is a situation where the individual is travelling and must determine whether to read in the traditional form or read by listening.

Introduction

In the 21st century, audiobooks have become a popular medium for individual reading. Liu et al. referenced the, “Global Audiobook Trends and Statistics (2018), [where] audio-book performed better than e-book, and [the] US has occupied the largest market share, where sales reached 21 billion dollars in 2016 and 23.5 billion dollars in 2017 (Liu et al. 2019. 716). The print industry has taken noticed of this emerging trend and recognize audiobooks as a part of the print industry. But it not just in North America that we see this emerging trend, Tattersall Wallin and Nolin in their 2019 study looked at how the subscription-based audiobooks were on the rise in Sweden where they conducted their research. Both researchers showed that more and more people are turning to audiobooks. Irwin in his piece noted that audiobooks, “reconnects us with the long tradition of oral performance in Western literature” (Irwin, W. 2009, p. 359).

For this project, my inspiration came from my students. Several of my students were using audiobooks to read their novels. Some of these students were reluctant readers and by using the audiobooks they had the stamina to actively participate in the recorded discussions. This meant that the audiobooks helped them retain key information from the text that they were reading. By allowing the audiobooks, all my students have completed their novels and were the drivers of their own learning. As I watched a few of my students using the audiobook in class, I was curious to examine whether this was simply a fade or should audiobooks become more common in education, especially in English or Language Arts.

Why Audiobooks? The Benefits in Education.

Audiobooks are beneficial for educators. Have and Pederson argue that, “readers are not just readers; they are listeners and users of electronic devices through different sensorial outputs and in a number of new contexts.” (Have et al, 2019, p. 13 and 14) This means that even though an individual is not reading the information in front of them, the individual, according to Irwin, is able to, “interpret themes and ideas in quite the same way the silent reader is ((Irwin, W. 2009, p. 363). This was further supported by Lui et al’s 2019 study where they found that dual channel promotes memorization in terms of knowledge and understanding amongst the reader. For teachers, we see that in Hartell’s study, she noticed increased motivation amongst the audiobook students especially amongst struggling students. This idea of increased motivation was further supported in Larson’s study, which was a six-week observation in a six-grade classroom near Larson’s university. Larson noticed in her observations that there was, “tremendous excitement and growing confidence as they engaged in digital reading and implemented student-centered instructional approaches.” (Larson, L. 2015, p. 176). Student customized their devices to accommodate their own needs and enhanced their learning. Larson found that digital readers can, “encompass a range of formats such as interactive or hyperlinked texts, animations, and audio (Larson, L. 2015, p. 176).

This is all important because what it reveals is that motivation was maintained amongst the students. By customizing the speed, students were able to maintain their focus and retain the information needed. This helps students ultimately improving vocabulary, comprehension and critical thinking skills. This means that the students controlled their own learning. Hence, educators need to embed the audiobooks as a part of their teaching practice. With the right direction and guidance from the educator, students had the necessary stamina and interest to remain engage in the discussions and assignments.

Audiobooks: Disadvantages

Despite the emergence of audiobooks, there were some disadvantages with the audiobooks for educators. The three big disadvantages were interest, access and reluctant teachers.

Interest

Amongst students, students often said that the level of interest in the book was still a factor in whether they finished the audiobook or not. Regardless whether the student is reading an audiobook, e-book or book, if they are not interested in the content of the book, they may lack the stamina or motivation to finish the book. This reminds educators that if students do not care about what they are reading, the technology is not going to improve motivation or interest if the student is not curious or interested in the fiction or non-fiction that they are being asked to read. Providing multiple options for students whether it is a literature circle might be a consideration for educators. As educators, it is important to provide fiction or non-fiction pieces that students will be interested or intrigued in to want to read.

Access

Hartell conducted her study in an elementary school in rural part of South Carolina. She observed that schools need to continually provide the audiobooks to their students because the students may not have the financial means to afford an audiobook. Without access to the audiobook, it will be difficult to continue to close the reading gap amongst non-readers, especially if they have become accustom to reading with an audiobook. In low income areas or areas without poor internet infrastructure, schools may need to provide the audiobooks to the students. This is important because as Moran noted in her article that, “audiobooks also reduced working memory deficit and remove printed word decoding anxiety.” This will help students be more open to reading.

Reluctant Teachers

In Hartell’s study, she noticed that teachers did not fully embrace audiobooks. The researcher found that, “teachers questioned the sustainability of the effect of audiobooks and wondered if students were only interested because the audiobook was a “novelty” (Hartell, A.W., 2018, p. 100). Unlike in Larson’s study where Mr. Clark embraced the audiobook and embedded the audiobooks into his practice, some of the teachers in Hartell’s study used it as a reward instead. By not embedding the audiobooks, Hartell felt that the teachers were undermining the potential that audiobooks had in the class. he felt that teachers still needed more professional development to see the potential that audiobooks could have in the classroom.

Conclusion

My goal in my podcast is to enlighten educators on the benefits of audiobooks in the classroom. I want to highlight how audiobooks have evolved and the potential that audiobooks can have in the classroom. Despite the disadvantages with audiobooks, my goal through the podcast is to show the potential of audiobooks in education. We need educators to embrace the idea of having audiobooks alongside novels because both are effective getting students to engage in text and gain exposure to more words, ultimately improving vocabulary, comprehension and critical thinking skills. Educators should start to consider how they could use audiobooks in their class. The goal for educators is finding ways to celebrate language in the classroom.

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