

Teaching Children's Literature Online: Co-constructing Stories in a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)

Enseñar literatura infantil online: la co-construcción de historias en un Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)

Ensenyar literatura infantil: la co-construcció d'històries en un Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)

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Abstract

Most scholarship on teaching children's literature has focused on teaching fiction in university literature courses (Bedford & Albright, 2011; Butler, 2006). While there is a vast literature associated with online teaching dating back more than 20 years (e.g., Palloff & Pratt, 2005), and there is increasing use of online teaching in university contexts (Rapanta et al., 2020), there are very few published descriptions or analyses of the online teaching of children's literature. In this article we document and discuss the development of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to be delivered in mid-2021 focusing on picturebooks developed at a university, in partnership with a popular MOOC provider. The MOOC development is analysed with respect to supporting the presence of the educators, creating clarity in the delivery of the content, providing spaces for reflection and interaction, and generating human connections in an online environment. These features are linked to the notion of storytelling (Bietti, Tilston & Bangerter, 2019). The contribution of picturebooks to supporting these aspects of effective online teaching is also discussed.

Key words: Picturebooks, Massive Open Online Courses, Effective online teaching, Human connection, storytelling

Resumen

La mayor parte de los estudios sobre la enseñanza de la literatura infantil han puesto el foco en la enseñanza de ficción como parte de cursos de literatura a nivel universitario (Bedford & Albright, 2011; Butler, 2006). Aunque hay abundante investigación sobre la enseñanza online desde hace más

de 20 años (por ejemplo, Palloff & Pratt, 2005), y el uso de la enseñanza online en contextos universitarios se ha incrementado (Rapanta et al., 2020), hay muy pocas descripciones o análisis sobre la enseñanza online de literatura infantil. En este artículo documentamos y analizamos el desarrollo de un *Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)* que se compartirá a mediados de 2021, enfocado en álbumes ilustrados, desarrollado por una universidad en colaboración con un conocido proveedor de MOOC. Se estudia el desarrollo del MOOC en relación al apoyo a los educadores presentes, la claridad en la entrega de contenidos, la aportación de espacios para reflexión e interacción, y la generación de conexiones humanas en un entorno online. Estas características se enlazan con las nociones de *storytelling* (Bietti, Tilston & Bangerter, 2019). También se discute la contribución de los álbumes ilustrados en apoyar estos aspectos en una enseñanza online efectiva.

Palabras clave: álbumes ilustrados, Massive Open Online Courses, enseñanza online efectiva, conexiones humanas, storytelling

Resum

La major part dels estudis sobre l'ensenyament de la literatura infantil han posat el focus en l'ensenyament de ficció com a part de cursos de literatura a nivell universitari (Bedford & Albright, 2011; Butler, 2006). Encara que hi ha abundant investigació sobre l'ensenyament online des de fa més de 20 anys (per exemple, Palloff & Pratt, 2005), i l'ús de l'ensenyament online en contextos universitaris s'ha incrementat (Rapanta et al., 2020), hi ha molt poques descripcions o anàlisis sobre l'ensenyament online de literatura infantil. En aquest article documentem i analitzem el desenvolupament d'un Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) que es compartirà a mitjans de 2021, enfocat en àlbums il·lustrats, desenvolupat per una universitat en col·laboració amb un conegut proveïdor de MOOC. S'estudia el desenvolupament del MOOC en relació al suport als educadors presents, la claredat en el lliurament de continguts, l'aportació d'espais per a reflexió i interacció i la generació de connexions humanes en un entorn online. Aquestes característiques s'enllacen amb les nocions d'*storytelling* (Bietti, Tilston & Bangerter, 2019). També es discuteix la contribució dels àlbums il·lustrats en donar suport a aquests aspectes en un ensenyament online efectiu.

Paraules clau: àlbums il·lustrats, Massive Open Online Courses, ensenyament online efectiu, connexions humanes, storytelling

1. Introduction

The academic study of children's literature has long been undervalued (Reynolds, 2011). Perhaps this is because of its association with a less powerful group in society (children), and the fact that it is predominantly researched by another less powerful group in academia (female academics). This double helping of disadvantage both in terms of audience and researchers may mean we should not be surprised that the study of the pedagogy of teaching children's literature in universities has received little attention. Exceptions to this are two edited volumes; one published in Britain in 2006, focusing on the teaching of children's fiction in the UK from a literary perspective (Butler, 2006), and the other published in the USA by the Children's Literature

Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) on the teaching of children's literature (Bedford & Albright, 2011). Aside from these two volumes, the dearth of literature concerning the teaching of children's literature contrasts strikingly with the plethora of literature concerning online teaching. This article brings these two fields together as we describe the development of a Massive Open Online Course or MOOC concerning children's literature, specifically picturebooks to be delivered mid 2021. The development of an effective MOOC can be compared to an effective form of storytelling (Bietti, Tilston, Bangerter, 2019).

Before we describe the details of this course development, we first review the literature about effective online teaching with a specific focus on the importance of presence and clarity. We then review the literature concerning the teaching of children's literature at universities.

2. Section Effective Online Teaching: Presence and Clarity

Effective online teaching and learning can be theorised through a sociocultural lens, that is, as a social experience where understandings are co-constructed in a community context (Bell, 2011). A sociocultural frame emphasises the human rather than the technological, first and foremost (Preece, 2000; Salmon, 2011). Far from being technologically determinist, a sociocultural perspective recognises the salience of human agency. It highlights students' and teachers' active participation in online learning, emphasising interaction, communication, collaboration and community.

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Aligned with social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), the view of online learning proposed here considers knowledge to be socially constructed, and highlights the role of communication. A key tenet of Vygotskian social constructivism is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), conceptualised as the distance between the level of independent problem solving and the level of potential development when the learner is guided by the presence and clear communication of a teacher.

The theoretical frame thereby emphasises presence and clarity as two key principles of effective online teaching. These two areas resonate with the authors' combined experience of 40 years of online teaching: In short, as teachers we aim to "Be there, and be clear."

Presence (or being there) is a way of conveying to course participants that their teachers are real human beings, who are knowledgeable, responsive and supportive. Garrison, Anderson and

Archer (2000) propose three categories of presence: cognitive, social, and teaching presence. Conceived as three core elements of a Community of Inquiry (COI), cognitive presence equates with constructing meaning through discussion; social presence is the projection of personality to be seen as ‘real people’; and teaching presence is about the design and facilitation of course content (Garrison et al., 2000). By engaging in online discussions, the course participants, in turn, establish their own presence in the course. Within a COI, participants construct knowledge as they share ideas and experiences, explore issues, argue about interpretations, negotiate meaning, discuss, reflect upon and re-evaluate their positions. It is the interaction within the course that has potential to create community amongst participants. In order to lay the foundations, however, our presence as educators is both a starting point and a means of continuity. Our presence tells the learners that they are not alone and invites them to connect with us and with each other.

When we reference clarity, we believe that effective online pedagogy involves clarity of communication with regard to purpose, expectations, structure, timelines, space, and reminders. Participants appreciate the security of knowing what they are learning and why. There is a resounding agreement in the literature that clear expectations at the outset of an online course are a necessity for this sense of purpose to be precise (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Dennen, 2005; Jackson, Jones & Rodriguez, 2010; Kumar, Martin, Budhrani & Ritzhaupt, 2019). A sense of purpose is reinforced by links between discussions and course content. Participants expect us to be transparent about how (and how often) they are to engage, how long their contributions should be, and how (and when) they will receive feedback. If course structure and timelines are clear at the outset, enabling participants to see what is coming up and when, a sense of purpose and anticipation is promoted. The curation of the online space must also be straightforward and uncluttered to create a pleasant learning environment. Finally, learning online can be overwhelming and is often fitted around an already full lifestyle. Hence, participants generally appreciate timely reminders about what is coming up to maintain clarity of direction.

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In their literature review concerning the role of storytelling in the creation and transmission of culture, Beitti, Tilston and Bangerter (2019) discuss the importance of storytelling for making sense of the new, and in creating social cohesion. They note the value of structure in the

organisation of ideas within the story. We suggest that both presence and clarity contribute to the storytelling needed in the creation and sharing of new knowledge in a MOOC. This links to the idea of learning through storytelling espoused by FutureLearn, the MOOC platform used for the children's literature course *The Power of Picturebooks* described in this article.

3. Teaching Children's Literature

The scholarship on teaching children's literature has focused on teaching fiction in university literature courses (Butler, 2006; Bedford & Albright, 2011). In Butler's volume, Pinsent and Reynolds (2006) surveyed the range of Masters programmes in children's literature offered in Great Britain at that time, noting the development of a distance mode for the delivery of the MA in Children's Literature at Roehampton University in the 1990s which used printed materials and online communication.

One chapter in the NCTE volume that explicitly discusses the development of an online university children's literature course is by Sylvia Vardell (2011) who explores the contribution of technology to the teaching of children's literature in the seven years since she first taught a Children's Literature Assembly Masters course in 2004. She notes that technology has greatly expanded access to resources and provided a myriad of opportunities for communication within the children's literature community. Looking into the future, she notes the potential for technology to continue to enhance learning opportunities in the field. At the time of writing, she herself had taught online courses using platforms such as Blackboard and WebCT for a decade. She observes the huge investment of time needed before online delivery in preparing written and video materials, and the importance of regular communication with students on a daily basis, rather than conventional face-to-face teaching in prescribed times. She also outlines the double-edged swords of accessibility, flexibility and technology which all act to enable online teaching at the same time as presenting challenges to both teachers and learners. So, for example, while technology makes online learning available to a wider range of students who may not be able to relocate geographically in order to attend a face-to-face course, it also means that access to the course material depends on technology working.

In their overview of 55 syllabi from college and university classes introducing children's literature to pre-service teachers, Martinez and Roser (2011) give examples from four professors of children's literature of their approaches to teaching, including Junko Yokota who encourages her students to use technology in their learning and assessments including keeping logs and contributing to online reviews. Martinez and Roser (2011) summarise that providing spaces for achieving thoughtful and collaborative discourse is an important aspect to consider when

designing children's literature courses. A more recent survey of 31 children's literature syllabi in the US state of Texas aimed to identify essential learning outcomes among children's literature courses taught in Texas (Sharp, Diego-Medrano & Coneway, 2018). There was no indication from this survey as to whether any courses were taught online.

We believe that this small set of literature concerning the teaching of children's literature in a university context in general, and the teaching of children's literature online, leaves a space for our description and analysis of creating an online course teaching children's literature using a MOOC platform.

4. Context

There are several contexts to consider in the MOOC development. The first is the context of the Massive Open Online course, and the second platform being used, FutureLearn.

4.1. MOOCs

Peters, Besley and Gordon (2014) chronicle the flowering of MOOCs that universities have offered from around the world since about 1998. They note that while they present some pedagogical challenges and depend on the technological capability of the student, they have the potential to disrupt existing models of tertiary education which can be linked to privilege by offering educational opportunities to underserved groups, and having the potential to co-exist with more traditional 'place-based' learning. MOOCs have the advantage of making learning accessible by making it free and available to anyone with a device and an internet connection. Tertiary institutions often see MOOCs as a way of recruiting students and as a kind of Public Relations exercise, which is far from trivial in these competitive times when universities are globally ranked according to reputation.

4.2. FutureLearn

FutureLearn.com is a digital platform established in 2012, and it is jointly owned by Open University (UK) and SEEK Limited (an employment agency). It has 175 partners (both in the United Kingdom and Internationally) who contribute MOOCs to the platform, and the University of Waikato in Aotearoa/New Zealand (where the two authors work), is one of them. FutureLearn hosts courses on a range of subjects with the most popular being business, management, healthcare and medicine, and teaching. It emphasises the importance of social learning and storytelling in the delivery of its courses (FutureLearn, n.d.). All courses are free and they are often used as recruitment tools, giving students a taste of a subject for which they might enrol in an entire course at the hosting university later. Alternatively, FutureLearn users can pay to

upgrade for extended access to a course, assessment, and certificates, leading to micro-credentials or online degrees. The model used in the online learning platform uses videos, articles, quizzes and discussions in a highly prescribed format. Among the more than 10 million learners who have signed up to study on the platform, FutureLearn attracts hobbyists who learn for leisure purposes; professionals seeking to upskill and update in specialist areas; and students who want to study flexibly.

5. Course Development

The development of the MOOC entitled 'The Power of Picturebooks' is the focus of this article. It resulted from an invitation for proposals from the institution where we work, which is a FutureLearn partner. Our proposal for a four-week MOOC was accepted and then, across 10 months, we met weekly to develop the course content. Nicola's focus was the content, and Dianne's the online pedagogy. The length of time taken was a reflection of the fact that this was completed alongside existing teaching and research commitments, a feature of the development of MOOCs commented on by Peters, Besley & Gordon (2014). Development of the course involved (1) clarifying the focus of each week's content, (2) locating suitable material for participants to read, (3) writing material to deliver some content, (4) creating video-recorded and audio-recorded material to deliver the content of the course, and (5) creating opportunities for reflection and interaction. Considerable time was spent requesting permissions for the video-recording of picturebooks, the use of particular readings, and for picturebook authors to be approached and interviewed.

5.1. Weekly Focus

We decided that the weekly focus for our four-week MOOC would tell a story reflecting our own

Thus, the four weeks of the course had the following foci: An introduction to picturebooks and their history; picturebook illustrations and visual analysis; investigating languages in bilingual picturebooks; and exploring social issues depicted in picturebooks

interests in the use of multiple languages in picturebooks and social justice. The course needed a general introduction to picturebooks. We believed that, given the central role of visual images in picturebooks (Arizpe & Styles, 2015), a week dedicated to visual analysis was also required. Thus, the four weeks of the course had the following foci: An introduction to picturebooks and their history; picturebook illustrations and visual analysis;

investigating languages in bilingual picturebooks; and exploring social issues depicted in picturebooks (see Figure 1).

Week	Focus	Materials
1	An introduction to picturebooks and their history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video: Meet the Educators • Article: 'What is a picturebook?' • Reading: 'A History of Picturebooks'
2	Picturebook Illustration and Visual Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio interview: 'Meet an illustrator' • Article: 'Visual analysis of picturebook illustrations' • Video: 'Learning to analyse picturebook illustrations'
3	Investigating languages in bilingual picturebooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article: 'Dual language picturebooks' • Video: 'Meet a dual language picturebook author' • Reading: 'How children's picturebooks can disrupt existing language hierarchies' • Video: 'Analysing language hierarchies in bilingual picturebooks'
4	Exploring social issues depicted in picturebooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article: 'Understanding others through picturebooks' • Reading: 'Bias starts early' • Two videos of picturebooks being read

Figure 1. Weekly Foci and Materials in Power of Picturebooks MOOC

Within these four weeks we wanted to present material as multimodally as possible, taking advantage of the affordances of online learning (Kumar, Martin, Budhrani & Ritzhaupt, 2019; Picciano, 2009). Therefore, we spent considerable time locating various materials to support the content delivery. Sometimes we located already published material, sometimes we created audiovisual material, and at other times we wrote our own material. A summary of material for each weekly focus is featured in column 2 of Figure 1.

5.2. Locating Existing Material for Reading

Locating existing material suitable for an extensive range of readers was a challenge. For Weeks 1, 3 and 4, we found readings with relevant information for that weekly focus and written in an accessible way. The Conversation provided two of the articles used- one in Week 3 and another in Week 4. The Conversation is a collaboration between academics and journalists which was established in 2011. It is an online publication which publishes articles presenting academics' research in an accessible 800-word article free to read and republish (The Conversation, 2021). One article on dual-language picturebooks and language hierarchies was chosen for Week 3 (Daly, 2019). Another on bias in picturebooks in some Australian early-childhood settings was used in Week 4 (Adam, 2020). Further reading was located in a chapter covering the history of picturebooks (suitable for Week 1) from a textbook written for a general lay audience. Ensuring

the material we provided for course participants was accessible for non-specialist readers, some of whom would have English as an additional language, was an important part of ensuring clarity of communication and engagement with the learners.

5.3 Creating New Written Material

The FutureLearn format provides for the writing of original 'Articles' to present content, and we used this tool to generate foundational material in each of the four weeks. FutureLearn itself provides a tool to ensure clarity of information within articles by giving articles written by course educators a score for readability based on several algorithms relating to sentence structure and vocabulary. Here, it became very useful to have two course creators; one who wrote the article, and one who could give editing advice from an informed outside perspective. Nonetheless, it has to be said that we struggled to achieve the recommended readability scores suggested for these articles, mainly due to our need to introduce the specialized vocabulary associated with visual analysis and our own writing styles honed for dense academic writing.

5.4. Creating Video-recorded and Audio-recorded Material

In order to develop a presence within the course, we knew it was important to have material where we were audiovisually present each week. This was achieved by creating short video recordings. In Weeks 1 and 2, both educators were present in these short clips: in Week 1 introducing ourselves and a picturebook we appreciate, and in Week 2 discussing the different aspects of visual analysis. Then, in Weeks 3 and 4 we took turns. In Week 3, Nicola introduced ways of analysing language hierarchies in dual-language picturebooks, and in Week 4 Dianne introduced our two guest picturebook readers. The involvement of guest readers was a way of diversifying the presence, in recognition that while the educators were a constant presence, our colleagues could create variation and freshness.

For engagement in the online platform, we knew it would also be effective to include some other voices and faces. As a result, we also created audio and audiovisual content featuring guests related to our weekly topics. In Week 2, we interviewed a famous picturebook illustrator in an audio-recording, with slides of her picturebooks shown during the recording. In Week 3, we have an audiovisual recording of a Zoom interview a Māori-English bilingual picturebook author. And in Week 4, we have audiovisual recordings of two fellow educators reading picturebooks featuring diversity in terms of expressing gender identity and socioeconomic and family diversity.

5.5. Creating Opportunities for Reflection and Interaction

Having both worked in education for many years, we have a strong belief in a sociocultural approach to knowledge, understanding that knowledge is created through interaction and reflection (Bell, 2003). In choosing to work with FutureLearn, we were encouraged that the philosophy underpinning their course design also emphasises community support and social learning (FutureLearn, n.d.), inspired by Laurillard (2002). Thus, the development of places for reflection and interaction was a strong focus in our course design. To set our intention of involving interaction throughout our MOOC, we begun in Week 1 with a discussion forum asking participants to reflect on a picturebook with special meaning to them from their past. A second discussion area in Week 1 was set up for participants to introduce themselves to one another using a picturebook that has special meaning for them. A discussion area is also included after a reading about the history of picturebooks where participants are invited to discuss what they had learned from the reading.

In Week 2, there are two discussion areas: participants are invited to reflect on their learning after listening to the interview with the illustrator, and after viewing the video explaining the visual analysis of illustrations, there is a discussion area for participants to share analysis of an illustration of their own choice.

In Week 3 a discussion area is provided to find and discuss a bilingual picturebook which participants bring from their own context. In Week 4, there is again a discussion area provided after reading the Conversation article about the lack of diversity in picturebooks in early childhood settings, and another to discuss reactions to the two guest speaker readings of picturebooks.

We have also included opportunities for participants to reflect more broadly on the MOOC, by including a half-way reflection in Week 2 and an end-of-course reflection in Week 4. These spaces invite reflection not only on the course content, but also on the learning experience, enabling participants to provide feedback and forward about what they enjoy and what they find challenging. Following the metaphor that our four-week online course was indeed an act of storytelling, we refer here to Bietti, Tilston and Bangerter (2019) who discuss the importance of “social activity in which people share cultural information in a collaborative conversational style” (p. 710).

Discussion is vital to learning as it enables participants to generate share experiences, articulate their position, generates critical consideration of a topic based upon consideration of multiple perspectives; discussion can act as a catalyst for action. Our extensive use of Asynchronous

Online Discussion (AOD) was a deliberate choice. This form of text-based discussion, where participants do not have to be online at the same time, has long been a cornerstone of distance learning for very good reasons (Locke & Daly, 2007).

Enabling participation across timezones, discussions help to generate community and provide opportunities for the sharing of experiences and co-construction of knowledge. Key affordances of AODs include flexibility, inclusivity, and deep learning. The most often cited benefit of this approach to discussion is having time to think and reflect. There is potential for high levels of peer discourse, whereby every participant can have a

voice. The fact that engaging in AOD involves reading and writing, in turn, affords the metalinguistic and meta-analytic advantages of print. The availability of an enduring record of discussions means that learners are more likely to be more attentive to others' views, more systematic and more exploratory. Being able to weave or synthesise ideas is enhanced because all contributions are preserved (Salmon, 2000). Writing is useful as both process and product of rigorous critical thinking, argumentation, and reflection (Aloni & Harrington, 2018; Hew, Cheung & Ng, 2010). Both the asynchronicity of time and the written communication format present advantages for thinking, affording thoughtful responses (Guiller, Durndell & Ross, 2008; Salter, Douglas & Kember, 2017).

In addition to discussions, the FutureLearn platform offers a tool called a 'quiz'. In each of the four weeks, after the Article (written by educators), we created a 6-question multiple choice quiz, allowing students to reflect on their learning in another more structured and individualised way.

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6. Enablers and Challenges for Supporting Clarity and Presence

Throughout the four-week MOOC *The Power of Picturebooks*, there were aspects of the course structure which supported or enabled clarity and presence in our storytelling, but there were challenges too.

We believe the most effective tool we had for creating a sense of being there, a sense of presence in the MOOC, was the use of audiovisual recordings. As mentioned earlier, we ensured we were both present in Weeks 1 and 2, as the participants became familiar with us. At least one educator was present audiovisually in Weeks 3 and 4. While research on online settings has shown that presence can be established in a text-based medium (Gunawardena, 1995), it can

more easily be established with vocal cues (Bialowas & Steimel, 2019; Ice, Curtis, Phillips, Wells,

Nevertheless, the challenges for maintaining a presence during the MOOC relate to the large numbers of students who typically enrol in a MOOC compared with other modes of delivering children's literature education at universities. It is difficult to establish relationships with large numbers of participants, and active moderation of online discussion with a massive volume of posts is also challenging

2007; Tu & McIssac, 2002). Furthermore, visual cues conveyed by video means enable an even greater sense of presence since the educators can be both seen and heard (Bialowas & Steimel, 2019; Borup, West, Thomas, & Graham, 2014; Clark, Strudler, & Grove, 2015; Han, 2013; Miller & Redman, 2010; Seckman, 2018).

We also used audio and audiovisual recordings to bring other voices into our storytelling across the MOOC, representing various genders and ethnicities. We created a diversity of presence by

having an audio interview with an illustrator (Week 2), an audiovisual interview with a bilingual picturebook writer (Week 3), and by having two educators read picturebooks on video (Week 4). In these ways, we harnessed a range of communication media - text, audio, and video - to boost our online presence (Bialowas & Steimel, 2019; Thomas, West, & Borup, 2017) and enhance our storytelling (Bietti, Tilston & Bangerter, 2019).

Nevertheless, the challenges for maintaining a presence during the MOOC relate to the large numbers of students who typically enrol in a MOOC compared with other modes of delivering children's literature education at universities. It is difficult to establish relationships with large numbers of participants (Chiu & Hew, 2018), and active moderation of online discussion with a massive volume of posts is also challenging. The lack of one-to-one dialogue areas within the online platform may also contribute to this challenge. The fact that participants will be working in a range of time zones means that responses may not be as immediate and synchronous as when the entire class is in the same time zone. This lack of immediacy may impact negatively on the participants' perceptions of the educators as present.

As for clarity, the FutureLearn format and structure is standardised, ensuring that whichever course a participant takes, the visual organisation of the online presentation will be familiar. This familiarity and consistency impart clarity to the course, as does structure in all forms of storytelling (Bietti, Tilston & Bangerter, 2019). FutureLearn's intent is to make the learning process visible so that course participants know what is coming next, where they are in a course, and how far they have come. In effect, FutureLearn provides signposts to indicate progress (FutureLearn, n.d.). FutureLearn also has inbuilt several features which support accessibility,

another important aspect of clarity. These include having transcriptions for any video or audio clips for the hearing impaired, or for learners of English who may find reading easier than listening to an unfamiliar accent. Some short-time learners may also choose to speed up the pace by skim reading a transcript rather than watching a video. The readability tool used to assess any lengthy written articles in the course ensures the readability of text. Having an alt (alternative) text is required for any images used so that screen readers can interpret these for the visually impaired.

7. Human Connection through Speech and Story

Having both participated in MOOCs ourselves, one of the things we noted from our own experiences was that when presenters used stilted reading styles in their presentations, we tuned out. For this reason, we deliberately aimed to use a chatty and conversational style in our video-recorded clips each week. These were later transcribed for accessibility. In effect, we 'scripted backwards' by loosely planning our presentation points (mindful of clarity), talking naturally (to convey presence), and then transcribing to produce the script (again, for clarity). This approach using backward scripting contrasts with the more conventional approach of scripting and then reading aloud.

Our intuition about the need to avoid stilted reading styles is supported by Bame (2016) who discusses the negative impression of stilted and overscripted presentations in MOOCs. This approach to online presentation is also supported by the work of Archard and Merry (2010) who explored online communication with Early Childhood Education students in an online course. Their findings showed that their own unedited and largely unplanned conversational podcasting was received favourably by students who commented on how it added a human touch, and allowed lecturers to develop an online identity which was much richer than if they had used writing only. Archard and Merry (2010) noted that their students appreciated knowing their lecturers beyond their roles as teachers. The human and personal features of voices (and sometimes faces) can convey to course participants a richer understanding about the presenters and help to ease the isolation of online learning (Salmon & Edirisingha, 2008). In this way, our retrospective scripting further enabled our online presence in support of connections and a sense of community.

Our inclusion of two picturebooks read aloud in Week 4 shows the particular affordance of the picturebook itself as a mode of content delivery and a means of connection within a MOOC. This inclusion of picturebooks adds a tangible aspect to the storytelling within our MOOC. We included stories within the overall story of the MOOC. *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine*

Dress (Baldecchino & Maenfant, 2014) is the story of a boy who likes to wear a tangerine dress from the Dress Up Box at school. He is teased but learns to be strong in his enjoyment of wearing the dress despite contravening conventional gender identity rules amongst his classmates. *The Trolley* (Grace & Gemill, 1993) is the story of a single mother not having enough money for Christmas presents for her two children and making a trolley (go-cart) for them from bits and pieces in her shed. Using Bishop's well-known metaphor of children's literature offering windows and mirrors (Bishop, 1990), both of these books were chosen to ensure that some participants might see themselves in the books being read, and others would gain some insight into realities which are not their own. As each picturebook is read and participants are drawn into the story, we know that facial expression, body language and intonation are contributing to the human connection (Archard & Merry, 2010) being made within the MOOC. We also believe that these stories contribute to the threads of the overall story across the course.

This sharing of picturebooks and stories also occurred during the interview with the illustrator (Dame Lynley Dodd, creator of *Hairy Maclary*) who reflected on many of the picturebooks she had illustrated, the interview with the bilingual picturebook author (Dr. Darryn Joseph, author of *Whakarongo ki ō Tūpuna. Listen to your Ancestors* who reflected on the writing of a specific picturebooks, and the introductions from the two lead educators who shared specific picturebooks they enjoyed as a way of introducing themselves: *Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy* (Dodd, 1983) and *Taking the Lead. How Jacinda Ardern Wowed the World* (Hill & Morris, 2020).

Several researchers have shown the pedagogical affordances of picturebooks when used to support tertiary education for preservice teachers (Daly & Blakeney-Williams, 2015; Johnson & Bainbridge, 2013) and Education majors (Myerson, 2006). Myerson's work with American undergraduate students described how well received by the students the picturebooks were in support of acquiring basic theories of learning and development. Johnson and Bainbridge's (2013) work explored the affordances of picturebooks to provide a safe space for discussing sometimes difficult issues. Daly and Blakeney-Williams (2015) explored how picturebooks were used by 8 teachers across a range of curriculum areas for modelling pedagogy, making links to communities, supporting visual analysis, and exploring social and cultural issues. In each of these studies, the power of the story within each picturebook (both text and image) appeared to be very effective in delivering new ideas (Bietti, Tilston & Bangerter, 2019). The development of the MOOC presented in this article provides another example of using the stories in picturebooks to connect with communities and explore what may be considered by some, difficult issues such as gender identity and family and socioeconomic diversity.

8. Conclusion

This article has outlined the development of a 4-week Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) entitled 'The Power of Picturebooks' which will be offered on the FutureLearn platform. We have explained the importance of presence and clarity through a sociocultural frame for effective online learning, and described how the course was developed in ways that maximise these attributes and provide opportunities for reflection and interaction. We have made links to the metaphor of storytelling across the course and threads of multiple stories within that larger story, focusing on the contribution made by stories from our guest speakers and in the picturebooks themselves in achieving human connection and exploring social issues. This description is based solely on reflections of the two authors concerning the process of the course. Future research is needed to explore participant reception and perception of the MOOC with respect to the contributions of clarity, presence and the stories from guest speakers and within picturebooks to the storying across the course as a whole.

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