

Chapter 5

Language Learning Beyond Content: An Exploratory Study of Higher-Order Thinking and Digital Literacy via Digital Book Trailers in an ESL Reading Classroom



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Today's students must be prepared to thrive in a continuously evolving technological environment, international students being no exception. An increasing number of international students come to English-speaking countries to improve their English skills and gain a different educational experience. In such a scenario, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers are among the first group of educators to help international students, especially those who are unfamiliar with current educational technology, to utilize technology for learning. In this paper, we, as ESL educators, introduced one such technology, known as the digital book trailer (DBT), to an ESL reading classroom.

DBT has emerged as a new vehicle that combines storytelling and digital video technology with a pre-project reading task (Gunter, 2012). The origin of DBT can be traced back to the tradition of storytelling. Human beings are essentially "storytelling and story-listening beings" (Moon, 2010, vii). Throughout history, storytelling has been a means of sharing knowledge, wisdom, and values. Educators could promote reading and literacy development by upholding the storytelling tradition with the aid of digital video technology, that is, digital storytelling (DST). In a DST, a creator narrates a personal story with the help of videos, images, and video editing

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software (Godwin-Jones, 2012). DBT adds a reading component to digital storytelling. Because of this add-on, DBT, to some extent, extends the DST process by giving readers a purpose to read: to create book trailers (Gunter, 2012).

DBT can be an effective instructional tool for teachers. The process of creating digital stories requires students to be able to locate relevant information, organize time and resources, utilize technological tools, make decisions, solve problems, and evaluate the stories produced (Robin, 2008). It is also an interdisciplinary practice that involves reading, writing, drama, and technology (Castañeda, 2013). Therefore, DBT lends itself well to learning opportunities beyond content.

This paper explores how DBT could be implemented in the specific context of the second language (L2) classroom to promote learning beyond content. Specifically, the authors were interested in the role of DBT in promoting higher-order thinking and digital literacy skills while providing opportunities for L2 literacy development. In doing so, the authors explain the rationale behind using DBT in L2 classrooms, followed by delineating a practical case of systematically implementing DBT in an 8-week intensive English as a Second Language reading course for adult learners.

DBT in Second Language Classrooms: The Rationale

DBT has not yet found its place in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). In fact, the authors were not able to identify a single empirical study using DBT in L2 classroom. Nevertheless, existing literature in SLA as well as literacy studies has witnessed a rising adoption of storytelling pedagogy, video technology, and the combination of both. Literature on storytelling pedagogy, Digital Booktalk®, and DST suggests that DBT could be instrumental in L2 reading instruction and learning.

To start with, DBT relies on a narrative or storytelling approach to promote literacy learning. The story structure facilitates learners' comprehension of events and actions (Haven, 2007). In a story setting, learners are placed in a contextualized environment which aids information comprehension (Bruner, 1990). Moreover, because stories organize information in a pattern that allows for learners' recognition and outcome prediction (Mandel, 1984), they make learning more engaging. Finally, when learners are taught the elements that make up a story or narrative, they are more likely to retain it (Kintsch & Keenan, 1973; Kintsch & Van Dijk, 1978). In short, stories can be utilized in an educational setting since they serve as an effective knowledge-sharing tool and help learners retain knowledge (Gunter, Kenny, & Junkin, 2018).

Furthermore, DBT has been used by researchers in literacy studies to promote reading motivation, among whom Gunter and Kenny have been the leading researchers. Gunter and Kenny (2012) noted that students in the digital age are generally more attracted to multimedia materials and shun traditional paper-based readings.

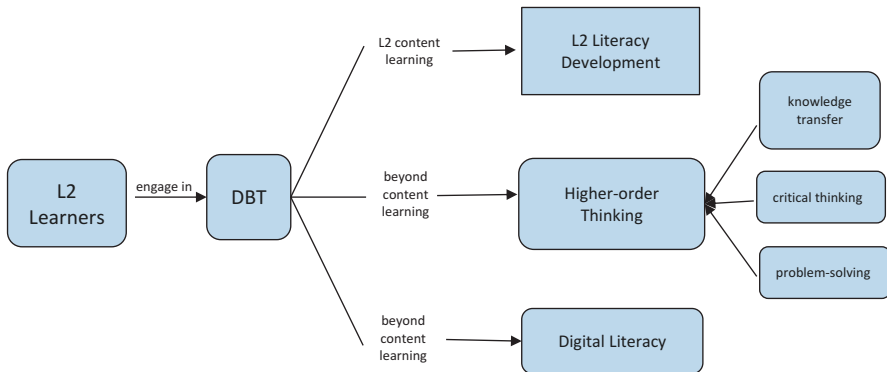


Fig. 5.1 Learning opportunities provided by DBT in L2 classrooms

Based on this observation, their series of field-tested research in K-12 settings (Gunter, 2012; Gunter & Kenny, 2008; Gunter & Kenny, 2012; Gunter & Gunter, 2015; Kenny, 2007; Kenny, 2008; Kenny & Gunter, 2006) has shown that DBT, referred to as Digital Booktalk® in their studies, can be instrumental in shaping learners' awareness of narrative structures and promoting reading motivation (Gunter, 2012). In addition, their research highlighted that DBT could function as an educational tool to transform individuals from passive media consumers to active content producers. As L2 reading classrooms share similarities with general reading classrooms, DBT practice can be equally beneficial for L2 readers.

In SLA literature, even though DBT studies cannot be found, researchers did show that DST can be a helpful tool for L2 learners. Hafner and Miller (2011) used DST with 59 college students enrolled in English for Science and Technology courses. The result indicated that students displayed high degrees of autonomy when participating in a meaningful twenty-first-century task which involves outside an audience. Yang and Wu (2012) utilized DST for 110 tenth-grade ESL students in Taiwan and found that DST participants improved English proficiency, critical thinking, and learning motivation. Castañeda (2013) integrated DST into Spanish language teaching in 12th grade and reported that DST provided students L2 practicing opportunities in writing and speaking and functioned as an authentic task. The study by Liu, Tai, and Liu (2018) showed that DST promoted language learning by enhancing oral reading fluency and extrinsic motivation among sixth-grade ESL students.

Drawing on literature relating to the instructional practices that informed DBT, the authors argue that DBT appears to be a promising tool to enhance L2 reading instruction and learning. In addition to the general benefits of using DBT in language teaching, the authors further propose potential beyond-content learning opportunities enabled by DBT in the following three areas: L2 literacy development, higher-order thinking, and digital literacy development (see Fig. 5.1).

DBT and L2 Literacy Development

Developing literacy skills in an L2 can be a challenging task. L2 readers and writers face a number of barriers posed by vocabulary, grammar, and stylistic and cultural differences (Nassaji, 2011). In addition, L2 literacy skills need to be developed in an integrated manner. Reading input itself does not necessarily translate into language acquisition; to internalize the language input, learners need to be pushed to produce output to improve their language fluency and confidence in L2 use (Swain, 2005). These L2-specific difficulties, adding to the general decline of interest in reading physical texts among the younger generation (Gunter, 2012), project bigger challenges for L2 literacy instruction.

DBT as an instructional technology can address these difficulties in promoting L2 literacy for the following reasons. DBT motivates L2 readers to read and write by setting a specific goal to achieve: producing a digital story. In addition, DBT could serve as an alternative assessment tool to encourage students to articulate their understanding. Finally, DBT could potentially bridge the divide between paper-based instruction and digital device usage. This paper does not focus on the role of DBT in actual L2 literacy development; nevertheless, potential language learning opportunities provided by DBT should be noted.

DBT and Higher-Order Thinking Skills

DBT as a learning activity has the potential to promote L2 students' higher-order thinking (HOT). The project adopted Brookhart's (2010) principles and guidance in understanding and assessing HOT because this specific approach takes into consideration the various HOT taxonomies that emerged over the years (e.g., Airasian, Cruikshank, Mayer, Pintrich, Raths, and Wittrock, 2001; Barahal, 2008; Nitko & Brookhart, 2007) while still considering classroom assessment needs.

Brookhart (2010) identified HOT in three dimensions: HOT as transfer, HOT as critical thinking, and HOT as problem-solving. Transfer means students are engaged in "meaningful learning" and "making sense of what they have learned" (Airasian et al., 2001, p. 63). Critical thinking means "reflexive and reasonable thinking that is focused on what to believe or do" (Ennis, 1985, p. 45). Problem-solving can be broadly defined as actively employing strategies to reach a goal (Brookhart, 2010).

DBT projects extend the conventional L2 reading instruction and increase learners' contact with the content so that learners could engage in more cognitively demanding activities beyond simply remembering and understanding content. L2 reading instructors could potentially promote HOT by guiding students to transfer what they learn from an L2 text, exercise their critical thinking, and solve technical and procedural problems to create digital artifacts.

DBT and Digital Literacy

The European Information Society defined digital literacy as “the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyze and synthesize digital resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process” (Martin, 2006, p. 135). Similarly, the International Society for Technology in Education (International Society for Technology in Education, 2016) released its standards for students and calls on educators to empower learners to actively utilize technology and become knowledge constructors and creative communicators. DBT projects could answer these calls by providing authentic tasks for students to use digital tools in classroom settings and express their knowledge in a digital format through video creation.

In summary, the rationale for using DBT as an instructional strategy in L2 classrooms lies in its potential to provide L2 learners with promising learning opportunities by engaging them in deep creativity and learning while expressing their most authentic selves. We do not presently know how DBT can be properly implemented in L2 classrooms to maximize learning opportunities. This chapter offers a concrete example of how a DBT project was designed and implemented in an adult ESL reading classroom to address the abovementioned goals.

Implementing DBT in an ESL Reading Class

Project Description

In this DBT project, adult ESL students were asked to create and present a 2- to 3-minute digital book trailer based on an English novel they read during an 8-week ESL reading class in the spring semester of 2018. The DBT project accounted for 20% of the course grade and was a compulsory assignment that students had to complete individually.

Each student went through a process of (1) choosing an English book appropriate for their English proficiency level, (2) reading it while following a recommended reading schedule, (3) submitting checkpoint assignments, (4) attending multiple face-to-face DBT training workshops, (5) composing the DBT, and (6) presenting their DBT to the whole class.

Instructional Context

The course The DBT project was implemented within a reading course titled “English Through Stories” at a university-based English language institute (ELI) in the southeastern United States. This particular ELI offers an English curriculum

catering to eight levels of English learners based on their English proficiency. These levels are specified as beginner (Levels 1 and 2), intermediate (Levels 3 and 4), upper intermediate (Levels 5 and 6), and advanced (Levels 7 and 8) in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2018). Each level of curriculum lasts for 8 weeks (7 weeks of instruction and 1 week for the final exam), during which students take four core courses (i.e., communication skills, grammar, reading, and writing) and one elective class.

“English Through Stories” is an elective language course designed for students who are at the upper intermediate to advanced English proficiency levels. The class meets for 50 minutes per day, 4 days a week (Mondays to Thursdays) for 8 weeks. The goal of the course is to help students practice and improve reading skills while learning to read for pleasure through fiction. Specifically, the course objectives include (a) familiarizing students with important literary elements and their functions within fiction texts, (b) improving students’ ability to infer meaning from unstated material, (c) developing students’ ability to apply background knowledge to their interpretations of texts, and (d) improving students’ overall enjoyment of reading in general and reading fiction in particular.

The course was determined to be a good fit for implementing DBT because the potential learning opportunities provided by DBT align with the course objectives. An additional advantage of choosing this course to implement DBT is that, due to its status as an elective course, the course structure is flexible enough to allow new projects to be introduced and changes to be made. Most importantly, both DBT and the course “English Through Stories” focus on storytelling as a central element. “Any intervention that utilizes story as its basis needs to include instruction on the elements of story making” (Kenny, 2007, p. 186). The regular instruction of course on basic elements of stories [e.g., time and place, cause and effect, a central character, a teller, and a listener (Branigan, 1992)] lays the foundation for students to grasp the storytelling aspect of DBT.

The instructor Because the DBT project needed to be integrated into the existing curriculum and become a significant part of the course, the authors invited the course instructor to participate actively in the instructional design stage of DBT. For instance, the authors and instructor collaborated closely in terms of making necessary adjustments to the course syllabus and lesson plans, as well as developing DBT project materials (see implementation procedures). The instructor has never included digital video elements in the “English Through Stories” class before but has received teacher training in instructional technology and holds a positive attitude toward the DBT project.

During the 8-week implementation period, the authors served as guest lecturers, volunteers, and observers in the classroom. Outside the classroom, the authors and the instructor held frequent meetings reflecting on and discussing students’ progress in completing the DBT project.

The students Seventeen students self-selected to be in this elective course, yet among them only nine students attended the class regularly. The authors and instruc-

Table 5.1 Demographics of the students

Age	First language (<i>n</i>)	Gender (<i>n</i>)	English level (<i>n</i>)
18–25	Arabic (6) Chinese (1) Japanese (1) Turkish (1)	Male (6) Female (3)	Upper intermediate (3) Advanced (6)

tor speculated that the low level of attendance was due to the course's nature as an elective course. Some students may have perceived it as less important when compared with the core courses and therefore had poor attendance.

As a result, the student data the authors were able to collect were from the nine regular class attendees. Table 5.1 presents the demographic information of the nine students including their age, first language, gender, and English proficiency. As can be seen, most students are young adults (ages range from 18 to 25). They speak different first languages, and Arabic speakers accounted for the majority.

In addition, the authors and the instructor made several key assumptions about the students when designing the instructional procedures of the DBT project. These included the following: (a) students may have a mixed level of motivation to attend class, read the assigned book, and complete the necessary steps of the DBT project; (b) students may have a mixed level of familiarity with digital technology; (c) students may have varied L2 reading abilities.

Book Selection

The starting point of the DBT project is storybook selection. Students were given choices as to which novels they would like to read and for which they would create a DBT. Physical copies of books from the *Oxford Bookworms Series*, a collection of American and European literature adapted for English learners and struggling readers, were provided in class for students to preview and choose. The books are in seven accessible levels, from beginner to advanced, and the students were suggested to choose a book depending on their interest and English proficiency levels. Examples of students' book selections include *The Scarlet Letter*, *Treasure Island*, *Great Expectations*, and *Pride and Prejudice*. Students selected the books in Week 3 of the course (see Fig. 5.2).

Implementation Procedures

The authors and the course instructor codesigned the procedures and elements of the DBT project, taking into consideration (a) best practices suggested by prior DBT research, especially the pedagogy of Digital Booktalk® developed by Kenny

<u>Week</u>	<u>Class Time Allotted</u>	<u>DBT Activities</u>	<u>Assignments</u>
3	1 class (50 minutes)	Introducing digital book trailer Project (the following information was provided to students: project description, checkpoint assignments, project timeline, reading schedule, book project rubric) Choose books	Checkpoint Assignment #1: Audio Reading Journal
4	1 class (50 minutes)	Workshop #1: Scriptwriting, Storyboarding, and Video Editing Software WeVideo	Checkpoint Assignment #2: Audio Reading Journal
5	1 class (50 minutes)	Workshop #2: Scriptwriting and Storyboarding Editing	Checkpoint Assignment #3: Storyboarding Worksheet
6	1 class (50 minutes)	Workshop #3: Video Editing	DBT Projects Due
7	1 class (50 minutes)	Presenting completed DBT projects and class voting on projects	

Note: We did not introduce the DBT project until the third week of the semester because students were still being registered into the course during week 1, and week 2 was Spring Break. Also, the DBT project ended in Week 7, as Week 8 is the final exam week at ELL.

Fig. 5.2 Timeline of the DBT implementation

and Gunter (Gunter, 2012; Gunter & Kenny, 2008; Gunter & Kenny, 2012; Gunter & Gunter, 2015; Kenny, 2007; Kenny, 2008; Kenny & Gunter, 2006), (b) the instructional context that the project was to be implemented in, and (c) the goal of exploring the role of DBT in promoting higher-order thinking and digital literacy development. Figure 5.2 presents the timeline of the DBT implementation.

The project design has been informed by Digital Booktalk® and Lambert's (2013) recommended steps of storytelling: (1) students learned the narrative constructs while reading English stories; (2) recall reading experiences; (3) retrieve memorable moments; (4) choose appropriate images and sounds; (5) record narrations; (6) storyboard; and (7) assemble, share, and critique digital stories. From Week 3 to Week 7, a total of five 50-minute face-to-face classes were devoted to the project: one class for introducing the DBT project, three for providing DBT instructions and workshops, and one for DBT presentation and viewing.

To set the students up for success, we also added the following noteworthy aspects to the DBT project design: at the beginning of Week 3, students were provided with a DBT information packet (e.g., project description, timeline, suggested reading schedule, and DBT grading rubric) and the opportunity to view sample DBTs, so that they could develop a clear vision of a pathway to producing their own DBT video as well as an understanding of the benefits of undertaking such a project.

In addition, every Monday, we provided support to students through in-class training and workshops, with weekly checkpoint assignments after class, aiming to monitor students' progress and provide them with formative assessments and feedback. This design allowed students to read, reflect, and create outside the classroom throughout the rest of the week with the information gained in class. The first workshop focused on mapping out each step required to create a DBT from scriptwriting to storyboarding to video editing. The second workshop was a working session in which the authors and the instructor helped students revise and edit drafts of their scripts and storyboards. The third workshop focused just on the video editing. Students were taken to a computer lab where they created their DBTs with on-site assistance from the authors and the course instructor.

Finally, the evaluation of the DBT was based on how well students did in completing (a) the three checkpoint assignments (i.e., audio reading journal, scriptwriting, and storyboarding worksheet) and (b) the actual DBT video. The assignments were worth 20 points, whereas the actual DBT was worth the remaining 80 points. Altogether, the two components of the DBT project added up to 100 points and constituted 20% of the total course grade. This way, our grading system gave students credit for putting effort into the process of creating the DBT, rather than solely relying on their final DBT product. All assessments were done by the course instructor based on a standardized rubric. During the DBT presentation, students could vote for their peers and provide feedback as a viewer but were not allowed to grade each other's work.

Results of Implementation

Throughout the DBT implementation, the authors obtained student assignments and video submissions, observed students' in-class participation, and collected student feedback through informal focus group interviews. The key results regarding students' beyond-content learning are as follows:

Student completion rate Out of the 17 students who registered for the class, 9 students (52.9%) attended classes regularly and completed the training and workshop sessions. However, only five students (29.4%) successfully completed the DBT project on time and presented their DBT videos in class. The other four students indicated that they did not finish the DBT project because they did not finish reading the books.

The low attendance and completion rate was undesirable, especially considering that the authors and the course instructor had already scaffolded the project through in-class workshops and checkpoint assignments as well as constantly encouraged and monitored the students to make progress with the project. Again, the authors and instructor speculated that the course's nature as an elective course might be one of the reasons why some students did not come to class and complete the project. In addition, students could still pass the class without completing the project because

the project was only worth 20% of the total grade. The students who did complete the projects seemed to be those who were more motivated and had more familiarity with digital technology. However, more stringent investigation will have to be done before we can propose answers with more certainty. On the positive side, students who did not complete their DBTs on time but attended the DBT presentation session were energized by their peers' productions and expressed willingness to finish their DBT videos.

Evidence of higher-order thinking skills Immediately after the DBT presentation session, an informal focus group interview was conducted with three students (one female from China and two males from Saudi Arabia) who successfully completed the DBT project. The authors interviewed the students to determine whether the DBT project indeed promoted their higher-order thinking (HOT) skills. The students' responses were audio-recorded and transcribed.

According to the data, there was evidence from the focus group interview that students used all three types of HOT (as transfer, as problem-solving, and as critical thinking). Firstly, one student noted that after completing the DBT project, he thought of using WeVideo, the video editing tool, to "produce some dramatic scene, maybe an action movie or something," which shows evidence for HOT as transfer.

Secondly, students also exhibited HOT as problem-solving. Students expressed difficulties in recording the voice-over in a satisfactory manner, especially regarding mispronunciation, lack of emotion in their own speech, and dealing with the mismatch between their voice and the background music chosen. To solve these problems, one student repeated recordings to capture her best pronunciations and intonations. This took up to "3 hours just on recording," and one sentence was "recorded ten times." Producing the best voice-over requires learning how to effectively use multiple recording devices.

Lastly, students shared that they had to exercise HOT as critical thinking. The students had to make decisions about what major plot points to include to achieve the goal of introducing a novel in a 2- to 3-minute video without revealing the ending of the story and convincing the audience to read the book. The task lent itself well to developing a critical thinker. Indeed, students shared that they "have never done a task like this," in which they had to "read, but not only read." Students had to "think very hard and deeply to make the book trailer interesting." Also, one student noted the benefit from watching other students' videos, especially to compare peers' work with their own and thereby learn what they did incorrectly.

Evidence of digital literacy development The authors further analyzed the focus group interview data as well as conducted DBT video analysis (see Table 5.2) on the five student-produced DBTs to determine if students had opportunities to develop digital literacy skills.

It is evident that students used (1) PowerPoint software for storyboarding; (2) search engines and websites to locate royalty-free images and video and audio materials; (3) smartphones or computers to record narration and create original video clips; and (4) iMovie or WeVideo to create and edit the DBT. These digital

Table 5.2 Evidence of digital literacy in student-created DBT videos (n = 5)

Student	Recording narration	Using pictures	Using sound effects	Using visual effects	Integrating readily available video clips	Shooting original video clips	Giving credits
A	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
B	x	x	x		x		
C	x	x	x	x	x	x	
D	x	x	x	x	x		
E	x	x			x	x	

literacy skills, according to the interview data, were developed through participating in the DBT project. One student recalled that “at the beginning, I was afraid of making videos. But when I started working on the project, and after that final workshop, my confidence was stronger.”

In summary, the results illustrated above shed light on the learning opportunities afforded by applying DBT to an L2 classroom with adult English learners. Even though the completion rate of our DBT project was low, the students who successfully participated in all components of the DBT project harvested both language-related content learning and beyond-content learning. Specifically, in 5 weeks, the successful students were able to (a) finish reading an English novel appropriate to their English proficiency level; (b) engage in unfamiliar tasks such as recording an audio reading journal, scriptwriting, storyboarding, and video editing; (c) improve digital literacy skills; (d) use higher-order thinking skills to internalize their reading; (e) independently produce a 2- to 3-minute DBT; and (f) share their work in a formal academic setting.

The DBT project offered students a learning experience which can rarely be found in a regular language classroom. More importantly, students who learned how to successfully produce a DBT once in our class are likely able, should they choose to do so, to extend such acquired learning to other video storytelling projects for future personal and academic purposes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how DBT can be applied to L2 classrooms to promote higher-order thinking and digital literacy skills in an L2, in addition to the conventional objective of L2 literacy development.

The paper offers a detailed rationale regarding the educational opportunities provided by DBT in L2 classrooms. The paper also provides pedagogical insights by delineating a practical case of systematic DBT implementation in an 8-week intensive L2 reading course for adult learners. The findings suggest that there was evidence that DBT in an L2 reading course could provide opportunities to practice higher-order thinking skills and foster digital literacy. Our results corroborated with

Ng's (2012) findings that digital natives can be taught how to use new technologies to create meaningful artifacts.

This study is not without limitations. Due to the nature of the course and the research setting, we were not able to select the most representative group of ESL students. Furthermore, the 8-week course setup placed a limited time frame for DBT project implementation. Even though the design of the DBT project provided ongoing support and necessary training and monitoring to encourage students to finish their DBT video, only 5 out of 17 students were able to complete on time, thereby further limiting our data analysis. Future studies could examine a different student population or operate with a longer time frame (e.g., 12 weeks or 16 weeks) to see if students will perform differently. Obviously greater participation among students within the program is also paramount for valid and reliable information to be obtained.

As one West African “griot” (troubadour-historian) related to a western scholar, “stories are more than entertainment; they are vehicles for learning” (Thornburg, 2013, VII). The digital age requires more practices and research that harness the potential digital book trailers can provide. The authors believe in the potential of learning associated with conducting DBT in L2 classrooms, so learners can process information and build skills in an L2 for future challenges.

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