

# ICT and Story

Grup 10-6 pdf corrections

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We cannot do without story. The National Literacy Strategy makes substantial provision for the use of story in literacy teaching; and yet, a visiting Martian educationalist, observing the Literacy Hour in operation, might be left with the impression that the principal reason for including story text in it is to provide raw material with which to improve children's ability to identify adverbs.

But story is about much more than school-learning. Barbara Hardy's much-quoted phrase about narrative as a 'primary act of mind' gets closer to the point:

'For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative . . .'<sup>1</sup>

Or, as Ted Hughes puts it:

'We all tell stories. We all recount odd incidents that have happened to us. In so far as we talk at all we are generally telling something of a story. Some of us go further and make up stories at great length, imagine how it would be if this or that happened to us, what would follow, what would happen next and next. In fact you could not live if you were not continually making up little stories. When you cross the road you hesitate and make sure everything is clear. You do this because a little story has run along in your head and shown you a car coming, screeching its brakes, swerving to miss you, bouncing off the far wall, probably turning over three times and bursting its doors and spilling out people and collie dogs, etc. . . . quite a hectic little tale, and it goes through your head in a flash, so quickly and lightly that you are hardly aware of it. Or when there is anything you want very much you are making up a story all the time of how you will get it and how it will be, and sometimes you put yourself through that kind of story almost as though you were living it. Sometimes you get quite lost in it and come back to yourself with a start.'<sup>2</sup>

It is a relatively short step from *story* to *stories*. Some stories have great antiquity. The two oldest stories are said to be the Warning Example ('. . . and one little boy went too close to the sabre-toothed tiger, and do you know what happened to him?') and the Embroidered Exploit ('. . . and then we saw a mammoth with

tusks that were *this* big . . .'). Storytelling is a fundamental part of our means of relating to each other, whatever our culture or apparent degree of civilization. As Margaret Meek puts it:

'Stories told and read to children give them both the age-old inheritance of their culture . . . and the templates, patterns and symbolic outlines for their personal storymaking.'<sup>3</sup>

And indeed many of us are really quite good at telling stories, whether they are recounts of our weekend exploits, elaborate jokes with punch-lines, or ghost stories round a winter fire. More than that, almost all of us are very skilled at listening to stories, at knowing intuitively how they work, at ascribing significance to actions or character types, at sensing when they are drawing to a close.

So what has all this got to do with computers and modern technology? I think we have barely begun to think about the possibilities contained in the relationship between ICT and story. The C stands for communications, and stories are perhaps the supreme means of communicating our common humanity. The problem is that, historically, computers have often been identified with the more instrumental, drill-and-practice aspects of literacy learning, or else have been seen simply as a vehicle through which creative writing can be enabled (and does not the phrase 'word processing' have a distinctly uncreative ring to it?). The honest answer to the question at the start of this paragraph is that we do not really know – yet. But with the rapid advances that ICT will undoubtedly make within literacy teaching in the next few years, it is time we started thinking about the answer, unless we want to be overwhelmed with yet more drill-and-practice stuff. The articles and ideas in this MAPE publication might be seen as a piece of toe-dipping in that ocean of possibilities.

## References

1. Barbara Hardy, quoted in Meek et al. (1977) *The Cool Web*, p. 13.
2. Ted Hughes (1967) *Poetry in the Making*, p. 87.
3. Margaret Meek et al. (1977) *The Cool Web*, p. 74.