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Sensing Success: Promoting Multimedia to Toddlers Through Touch'n'Feel Books

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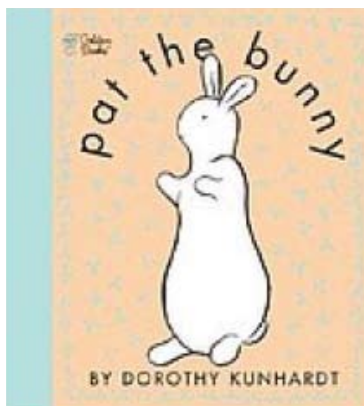
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Sensing Success:

Promoting Multimedia Skills to Toddlers through Touch'n'Feel Books

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Kunhardt's *Pat the Bunny* is probably THE classic touch 'n' feel book, beloved by generations since 1940.
ISBN: 9780307120007
OCLC: 7375218



Tails pulls out all the stops (pun intended!) to help toddlers learn their numbers.
ISBN: 9780152167738
OCLC: 50424224

Multimedia trends in education and information distribution stand to revolutionize how children perceive, learn, and interact with the world around them. Multimedia educational tools can already be seen in classrooms around the globe (Looney, 2005; Thomas, Place & Hillyard, 2008), and present exciting new ways for students of all learning styles to grow in intelligence and understanding. However, our youngest students cannot simply be thrown into the proverbial multimedia deep end once they reach a certain age or grade, and be expected to thrive. Instead, gentle assimilation through print holds the key to a child's first steps into the multimedia universe (Gogate, Walker-Andrews & Bahrick, 2001). And funny though it may seem, there may not be any better type of book to help our children begin on this path than the unassuming touch'n'feel board book.

What is a touch'n'feel book?

Touch'n'feel books are printed materials primarily suited for infants and toddlers (subsequently referred to only as toddlers) that offer tactile interaction between the toddler and the storyline. Possibly the most widely known title in this sub-genre of board books is Dorothy Kunhardt's classic *Pat the Bunny* (1940), wherein the reader leads the toddler in an intersensory romp through the every day goings-on of a middle class family's home. The toddler is encouraged to not only hear (audio) and see (visual) the story laid out for them, but they are also propelled to interact with the storyline by feeling a blanket, touching dad's rough beard, or, as the title promises, patting a bunny (tactile).

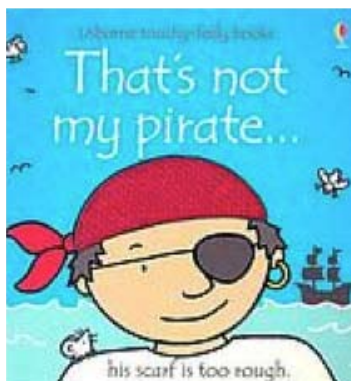
More recent books have incorporated further intersensory activities in which the toddler can begin to draw correlations between words, objects, and pictures. For instance, Matthew Van Fleet's *Tails* (2003) allows the toddler to get their first whiff of a skunk via a strategically placed scratch'n'sniff sticker, which helps to reinforce the print and visual clues already on the page. Thus, the book has created yet another intersensory connection to help the toddler begin to draw a conclusion between the storyline being read out loud, a skunk's questionable olfactory emissions, and the subsequent reaction of the other animals on the page.

What can touch'n'feel books possibly produce?

"Sensory integration theory provides a conceptual foundation explaining the interaction between sensory systems to produce functional outcomes" (Pizur-Barnekow, Kraemer, & Winters, 2008). This theory drives the idea that by appealing to a wide base of senses, humans are able to gain greater information about a subject or object. For toddlers, who are right at the beginning of exploring and understanding the world around them, it seems practical to offer them a wider panoply of information through multiple sensory stimuli in order to give a more enriched understanding of the object.

The popular *That's not my ...* series of touch'n'feel books by Fiona Watt (1999) is an excellent example of how touch'n'feel books can introduce toddlers to subjects that can be





Watts' inclusive touch-n-feel book provides a bounty of tactile plunder for babies and toddlers.

ISBN: 9780794517021
OCLC: 163163858



A sturdy, interactive book for the youngest 'reader,' from the creative and prolific children's author, Roger Priddy.

ISBN: 9780312501921
OCLC: 180751988

very difficult for them through sensory stimuli. In this case, it's learning how to differentiate between similar objects by locating the variations between them. Each book follows a formulaic model of a little white mouse trying to locate an object, animal, or person that belongs to it, such as, a puppy. Three, often four, senses are being stimulated throughout each book, as the toddler hears the story being read aloud, sees the picture of the dog, and receives tactile reinforcement about the descriptive word that is being used to differentiate the dog on the page from the dog that is actively being sought by the mouse. The fourth sense tends to be taste, as when the toddler inevitably gnaws on the corner of the book.

Other books, like Roger Priddy's *F is for Farm* (2008), draw cognitive connections between cause and effect for toddlers. On one page, the toddler has the ability to pull a tab, thus engaging their fine motor skills, which results in a duck's bill moving up and down. With simple verbal instruction, the reader can produce a 'quack' noise for the toddler each time the tab is pulled. This helps to re-enforce that when a duck opens its mouth, a 'quack' sound, rather than a 'moo,' 'buzz,' or 'Good day, sir,' will usually emanate from the duck. Making this connection is extremely important for the toddler, because "infants and young children in a language community must realize that (a) heard speech (words) and seen objects or actions are related, (b) specific words function as symbols for objects or actions, and (c) such words denote specific objects or actions" (Gogate, Walker-Andrews, & Bahrck, 2001).

Abilities like being able to separate things that look or sound similar and understanding cause and effect relationships are two of the principal touchstones for early literacy. This is vitally important to the toddler as a future student, because "the child who is able to get over that first barrier and master phonemic awareness skills holds, in his or her hands, the keys to success in an information-based classroom and an information-based world" (Lally, 2001).


How do touch'n'feel books help in a multimedia world?

Over the last few decades, educational professionals have begun to realize that not everybody learns the same way, with the three major modes of learning being audio, visual, and tactile (Pizur-Barnekow et al., 2008). However, results would be detrimental to the class as a whole if teachers tried to fulfill the need of each and every student on an individual basis. With recent developments, multimedia educational tools have allowed educators to begin looking at new multimodal ways of presenting information to their students on an individual basis like never before (Loony, 2005; Thomas, Place, & Hillyard, 2008). "With the help of technology, the students begin to see their world differently and find new ways to explore a topic, even if it's unfamiliar" (Loony, 2005).

It would then seem plausible that new students who have been regularly exposed to touch'n'feel books since infancy would enter into the multimedia educational environment with a strong fundamental understanding of the necessity to experience a subject from a variety of ways. By learning at a very early age that objects can be manipulated with a wide array of senses in order to gain better understanding, children will hopefully enter the multimedia classroom with the skills necessary to enrich their personal educational experiences beyond what is being delivered by the teacher (Gogate et al., 2001).



How can children's librarians help?

Children's librarians can play a vital role in helping toddlers prepare for an educational environment that is more individual, interactive, and intersensory than previously offered. Educating parents, guardians, and day-care providers on how touch'n'feel books provide toddlers with valuable early literacy and intersensory perception skills can help build a learned patron base. It can also be accomplished in a multitude of easy, fun, and routine ways. For instance, passing a touch'n'feel around at story-time while offering helpful insights to the toddlers on what they're feeling, why it feels that way, and what else feels the same way can act as a hands-on demonstration for the adults in attendance. Providing further information can help adults better understand how to help their children enter the multimedia classroom with the primary skills necessary to succeed, and that it can be accomplished with something as simple as spending quality time with their child and a touch'n'feel book. 

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