

Business Plan

Snorey-time Pillow

Interactive Storytelling tool



(image: Turner, 2024c)

Introduction.

The “Snorey-time pillow” – Interactive storytelling tool was imagined as a way to encourage children to engage with books, especially when they aren’t encouraged to at home. Whether children develop an interest in reading and learning can depend on influences from home, family, and socioeconomic background (Kim and Bacos, 2020). Children also benefit from the opportunity to explore scenarios on their own, to develop autonomy, and provide motivation for learning (Kim and Bacos, 2020). In addition to this, some children are more physical learners and need to experience a story in real time to process and understand it (Teach Early Years, 2024). All children enjoy being part of a story and enjoy interacting with the adults and with the books themselves.

What is the “Snorey-time Pillow” – Interactive reading tool?

The “Snorey-time Pillow” is a large comfortable cushion made from brightly coloured felt which comes with a handy pocket on the back and includes a storybook and numerous felt pieces relating to that story.

The prototype pillow is shown on the front of the business plan and the theme of it is ‘The Three Little Pigs’ but below are some storyboard ideas that have been drawn to demonstrate other marketable ideas.



(image: Turner, 2024a)



(image: Turner, 2024b)

Children interact with the pillow as the story is being read to them, all the while adding and removing pieces as required. The story pillows also help to teach numbers, colours, and shapes. Children can directly interact with the story that is

being read to them but the pillow provides opportunities for independent play when a child can recall the story to entertain themselves or even make up their own later using the story pieces (Play matters, 2024).

A little about the creator?

The “Snorey-time Pillow” is the brainchild of Lindsay Turner, a busy single mum to a 13-year-old boy with ADD who also has over ten years of experience working in the Early Years and Youth sectors with children between the ages of two and eleven. During this career, Lindsay was a great advocate for introducing books to children and had a strong belief that this fosters a love of books and reading and encourages language development and imagination.

What benefits does this product give to the Early Years?

This product benefits the Early Years sector for several reasons. Stories stimulate the imagination and are a great way to enhance children’s language, cognitive, emotional, and social skills. Book sharing and reading are important in the bonding process. Before learning to read, children learn how to listen, and reading aloud to children develops skills such as listening comprehension but also improves writing, and speaking and facilitates self-regulated learning (Kim and Bacos, 2020). When listening to stories can support instruction by itself, significant learning occurs. Children are learning by doing (Bruner, 1960, cited in Jarvis, George and Holland, 2013). Play is an activity where children learn by doing and incorporating play into the story supports motor skills, early literacy, and social and emotional development (Ginsburg, 2007).

The main objective of the “Snorey-time Pillow” is to facilitate children’s engagement with stories more physically and imaginatively. The product teaches several concepts along with the main idea of the story including colours, shapes, numbers, positioning, and sequencing. The story cushion is bright, colourful, and interesting and peaks children’s imagination, laying the groundwork for developing creative skills.

The interactive nature of the “Snorey-time Pillow” follows the teachings of Montessori who believed that children learn best when all their senses are involved. Montessori observed that learning happens through repetition, concentration, and imagination (Nutbrown and Clough, 2014).

Who is the target market?

The current range is targeted towards children in early years from the ages of 2 to 5 years old. This stage of literacy development is known as the emergent phase, and children are involved in discovery learning (Piaget, cited in, The education hub, 2021). Children are developing listening skills, they learn sequencing and abstract concepts from the use of repetition and reinforcement and this pillow provides an opportunity for both these things (Roopnarine and Yildirim, 2018). Of course, children from this demographic do not control their purchases so the product also has to be targeted at the parents. To make the product appealing to the parents it first must be loved by the children and market research within local schools and nurseries has proved this already. The second important factor is to ensure that parents realise the educational benefits that this product provides to their child. The marketing strategy is to advertise the product from both angles, satisfying both demographics and increasing interest and therefore sales (Investopedia, 2024).

The product is also marketed towards the business sector. Schools and nurseries have been included in the market research and the obvious educational benefits are demonstrated when children and teachers embrace the product as a reading tool. The pillow supports both educators and parents by enhancing their efforts to help children to develop better literacy and more advanced self-regulation (Kim and Bacos, 2020).

What challenges or barriers can be foreseen and can they be combatted?

The product has been looked at in detail and the positives and negatives have been highlighted so that any barriers and challenges that can be foreseen can be addressed.

The unique selling point of this product is that it merges the ideas of story time and play. It addresses some children's needs to process information in a more physical and sensory manner, it also ensures children can explore their imaginative play in a guided or independent way. The product is appealing to small children with its bright colours, interesting characters, and soft textures. It is relatively low-cost to produce. Although the prototype is handmade, templates for pieces can be industrially cut in bulk and then fabricated as required, ensuring a standard of uniform quality and lowering production costs (Business Wales, 2024).

The current range is limited to the depiction of popular folk tales but market research has suggested that customers would be interested in extending the line to include more modern popular book titles. These titles are licensed and copyrighted however so this option would need to be explored further and additional costs factored in as it could harm price position and profit margins (The Prince's Trust, 2024).

Storytelling and shared book reading along with the acquisition of language are an important feature of child development and also of current curricula worldwide. There will always be a thriving market for children's literature. Where possible the company must ensure that materials are environmentally appropriate and sourced from sustainable producers. The product can be adapted to target alternative markets, including those for the visually impaired by using more textured materials.

The children's literature sector has been thoroughly analysed to determine what comparable products are currently on the market. There are similar reading tools that are used alongside storybooks for example, story stones, sacks, and bedtime cushions, but the unique selling point of bringing the story to life and incorporating both shared book reading and possible independent play seems to be a gap in the market. However, despite this gap, there are possible further challenges that the company could face. It is essential to ensure that materials are environmentally appropriate and sourced from sustainable providers, for example, the felt is sustainably sourced and made from natural wool and not made from synthetic felt which is not biodegradable. Likewise, the felt is coloured using natural organic dyes from a company that works towards supporting adults with additional needs by providing training and employment (the outside, 2024). The company did consider using cheaper synthetic materials but

decided to demonstrate instead the importance of ethical and environmental considerations, including the sourcing of materials and environmentally sustainable manufacturing processes.

In addition to this, the company must ensure that the product meets the Toy Safety Regulations 2011 for children under 14 years of age and that the product passes safety checks for fabric flammability, and chemical content and meets appropriate labelling requirements (HSE, no date). Having a deep knowledge of how ethically the raw materials are sourced and produced gives us great confidence in the quality of the finished product.

The company is reliant on small business grants and private investors to move on to the manufacturing and distribution phase of this project, as was discussed in the business pitch but there is a small contingency fund in place which is important given the current financial climate (Business Wales, 2024).

Part 2.

Many early years theorists advise of the importance of reading to and with children and the benefits that this can provide, not only with attachment and bonding but with early language acquisition, and social, cognitive, and emotional development (Niklas, Cohrsen, and Tayler, 2016). Vygotsky stated that storybooks are tools that can guide learning and discussed the importance of relationships and interactions between individuals and how cognitive understandings are enriched and deepened when learning is scaffolded (cited in Jarvis, George, and Holland, 2013). The “Snorey-time Pillow” provides rich opportunities for learning to be supported and reinforced by adults. The practice of repetition reinforces the story and helps with sequencing, recall, and creative imagination (Piaget, cited in Kim and Bacos, 2020). Vocabulary learning is supported when adults use the pillow to go beyond the text of the book to engage the child and then by using repetition to increase familiarity and promote retention (Read, Rogojina and Hauer-Richard, 2022).

Children acquire the basic principles of language by three years of age (Weisburg *et al.* 2013), and hearing books read aloud helps to develop vocabulary (Wan, 2000). The ability of children both to listen to and then to reproduce information from storybooks read to them is believed to have important implications for literacy (Wan, 2000). Preliterate children can produce vibrant, detailed mental representations of story events told to them (Kim and Bacos, 2020). Piaget believed that language is a tool that helps to create thought and that more exposure to reading made the vocabulary richer and the child more able to indulge in complex thought (ref). The passive activity of listening can also be an active form of learning when the child can imagine and act out the concepts being taught (Singer and Singer, 2005).

Books that repeat phrases or include simple rhymes help to develop children’s vocabulary further, and introducing an interactive element to the read-aloud, such as role play or story retelling helps children to mind map new words (Lake and Evangelou, 2019). When children are in control of an interaction they are truly engaged and when children direct the play they control the narrative (Weisburg *et al.*, 2013). Play has rich benefits for children’s language development because it incorporates many of the cognitive elements and social boundaries that known to

influence language skills. The pillow provides a key variable linking play and language which is adult support. Guided play which scaffolds child-initiated learning is ideal for developing language skills. Language is the currency of social interaction. Language thrives when children are playfully interacting with adults (Weisburg *et al.*, 2013).

Reading to a child is also important because it promotes a bond and establishes reading as a valued activity. Stories behave as a framework for children to understand the society within which they live, the social relationships around them, and to make sense of their environment and the different perspectives of people within it (Kim and Bacos, 2020). Being read to increases children's knowledge of the world, helping to create a broad base of experience with which to comprehend and interpret other things (Wan, 2000). In addition to this, it has been found that children can manage many more characters when using props than just with their minds (Lake and Evangelou, 2019).

Within the language, literacy, and communication area of learning in the national curriculum for Wales, the importance of creating a language-rich environment is paramount. Enabling adults are expected to provide meaningful, imaginative, and varied activities to promote interest in reading for enjoyment, imagination, and learning (Welsh Government, 2024a). The "Snorey-time Pillow" is an excellent example of how book text can be extended into educational play. The new curriculum for Wales is a play-based curriculum and merging literacy and numeracy with play is one of the main aims (Welsh Government, 2024b). Additionally, there has been a recent initiative to provide thousands of books to children across Wales, intending to improve key reading and speaking skills from a young age (Welsh Government, 2021), and the "Snorey-time Pillow" can form a viable aid to accompany such initiatives.

The "Snorey-time Pillow" explores how parents can support children in their learning and expands the definition of what it means to be literate. The home learning environment has a heavy influence on the development of a child and Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory offers a theoretical framework to demonstrate

children belong to a complex and evolving social and cultural ecology (Niklas. Cohressen and Tayler, 2016).

Other products on the market aim to link literacy with physical resources in the same manner as the 'Snorey-time Pillow', such as story sacks. Story sacks usually include a good quality children's book along with supporting materials to stimulate reading activities. The use of soft toys or puppets and artifacts that relate to the story helps to bring the story to life and cement the ideas and concepts within (Barron and Powell, 2003). The "Snorey-time Pillow" uses the same techniques to stimulate children's imaginations and creativity but within a more interesting and intriguing play space. In addition to this story sacks are usually created at home or school as part of an exercise to extend children's learning of a particular book or topic whereas the "Snorey-time Pillow" is a marketable interactive reading tool that incorporates learning, creativity, imagination, and play. Creativity and play are naturally connected. Children use fantasy, symbolism, and divergent thinking to weave a context, stories, and characters (Hoffman and Russ, 2012).

The premise of the "Snorey-time Pillow" gives plenty of scope for future developments in the range. As was discussed briefly in the business pitch the company has developed storyboards to demonstrate how other stories could be brought to life in the same manner. It is also possible to expand the range into other market sectors by making small alterations in the materials or design. A prime example of this would be to develop "Snorey-time Pillows" that could be used for visually impaired children. By providing a tactile reference point the child can interpret and associate meaning to the pieces and understanding to the text (Bara, 2013). The use of physically manipulatable characters and environments involves children more completely in the story and by exploring the use of texture and material and placing the focus more on the tactile representation rather than the visual could provide visually impaired children with a reading tool that can help bridge the gap between text and comprehension (Bara, Gentaz and Valente, 2018).

Another possible avenue for development would be to explore the use of stories within play therapy. The storytelling activity already provides a prerequisite of child engagement that could be adapted to fit the play therapy sector, the pillow providing

a focal point or distraction for the therapy topic (Arad, 2004). Externalisation of feelings and messages through interaction with a physical tool can facilitate dialogue and allow the participation of both adults and children alike (Arad, 2004).

A possible barrier to manufacture could be the company's desire to produce the product using only sustainably sourced materials which is not a cost-effective approach but instead concentrates on ethical and environmental considerations which the company believes consumers are more aware of in the current age. Public concern over environmental deterioration and social issues is now more prevalent than ever and this is reflected in the company's ethos. An interest in the environment is now a marketable concern and companies that care about the planet and choose greener alternatives over profit margins are on the rise. The importance the company places on sustainability, education, and the future should be seen as an important selling point rather than a barrier (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2021).

In conclusion, the "Snorey-time Pillow" would be an attractive addition to the children's literature sector. The product should be marketed with an emphasis on quality, sustainability, and on the educational benefits of reading to and with your child. With the appropriate financial backing and marketing expertise there is scope for future expansion into other avenues.

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