

Afternoon Workshop 2

Reading Online: what teachers can learn from adult literacy learners

Irene Schwab

Participants were given a copy of the Metro newspaper and then asked how reading the paper compared with reading from a web site and to note the differences with how a 'new reader' might read the newspaper and the web site.

In the following discussion the following points were made:

- One might have prior knowledge of how to read the newspaper
- Information was presented differently on-line: one scanned the screen and picked out what one wanted to read
- One could create one's own reading path on the web site
- Need to know about scrolling for web site
- On-line reading more immediate, more pictorial, the image was as important as the words, spatial layout important, could have moving images
- Print more linear
- On-line reading needed manual dexterity and computer skills
- More skill reading on-line but how much was taken in? Look at reading matter differently
- New readers often try to read on-line as they would with hard copy

Irene Schwab's research

Looked at:

- Is there still a digital divide? And if so will it get bigger?
- Why aren't teachers using digital texts?
- Why is there no research on digital reading with adult literacy students

Aims of the research

- Look at reading practices
- Skills and strategies used
- What are students reading in digital form

The Research was qualitative with 18 students drawn from 2 Entry level literacy classes at a London college. There was a brief questionnaire and then semi-structured interviews in pairs. Students set tasks and then talked about these.

The tasks were:

- To find a news story that interested them
- How they made judgements
- How to shop
- How to find facts

All the students used the Internet. Half of them every day. A quarter through their mobile Two thirds used the internet outside college. Almost all accessed the internet in English

4 research findings:

- Attitudes: very positive about internet reading because it represented social capital; access to more and free information; made shopping cheap and convenient; can practice reading and writing outside the college in an engaging way with instant feedback. Some didn't see it as reading. This had the benefit of making them more willing to problem solve and ask for help. The limitation was they didn't use the reading skills they had been taught.
- Internet practices: different practices in and outside the college; wide practice beyond reading – shopping, news, social networking, job hunting. Learners use internet to follow up their own interests but rarely engage to respond to postings. They use the internet to stay updated with news, friends and sport
- Skills in using the internet: especially useful but there are challenges if the reader can't spell. Everyone using Google more or less successfully. Using multi-modality. This was especially useful for those with disabilities. On screen reading required good computer skills to make use of the affordances: skills in scrolling, using hyper links, using menus and spatial layout
- Critical reading:
- Most aware that on-line text was not neutral and they had strategies for making decisions about what to believe.
- Collaborative learning important. Students get support from family, friends, peers as well as their lecturers. Sometimes they prefer support from their peers

Conclusions

- Fund of knowledge on IT that teachers can draw on. Learners current users of the internet outside college
- Learners need strategies for reading the internet so that these can be built on

- Learners could make more use of the inter-active features of web 2.0
- Computer and literacy skills:
 - ⇨ Computer competence as important as teaching skills in on-line reading; teachers need to focus on both
 - ⇨ Learners seem happier to problem solve where computers concerned. Teachers could help transfer these skills into more independence in reading
 - ⇨ Leaders need to de-mystify the processes of reading on-line