Chapter 10

Promoting Strategic Reading Using the iBooks Author Application

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ABSTRACT

Students are increasingly bringing their own mobile devices into the classroom. However, they do not take advantage of the various features that technology offers for supporting learning. The focus of the chapter is on digital reading in learning and particularly in foreign language learning with tablets. The author reviews the literature on digital reading and discusses briefly the use of reading strategies to promote reading comprehension. This is followed by a discussion of how the application iBooks Author was used in a research project in September 2012 in an Adult Education Centre in Denmark. The aim of the project was to determine to what extent students employ reading strategies when using tablets and which functions in the tablets support reading comprehension. Using a theoretical framework for learning strategies, the author discusses the design of digital material embedding reading strategies. The chapter concludes with practical suggestions for teachers and educational designers for promoting strategic reading using the iBooks Author application.

INTRODUCTION

With the arrival of technology in the classroom, more and more textbooks and reading materials are published in a digital format. There is much debate on whether the print format is more effective for learning than the digital media (Baron 2013, Szalavitz 2012, Wolf 2010). Wolf (2010) suggests that the way we read is influenced by the medium. She claims that digital reading may hinder deeper reading processes such as analyzing and reflecting (Wolf 2010). Mangen, Bente, & Brønnick (2013) argue that reading texts on a computer screen is detrimental for reading comprehension. Their study used pdf files as digital material, thus, it did not take advantage of all the possibilities of the medium, such as inserting a table of contents where you can click to navigate to specific chapters or sections, or embedding a video or an audio.

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Moreover, students need to learn how to read digital texts because as, Strømsø and Bråten (2008) put it:

*Digital texts are key information resources in today’s society, and we must learn to use them in order to participate in it. We cannot drop digital texts. (Strømsø and Bråten, 2008, p. 202, my own translation from the Danish.)*

That is to say, students need to learn how to use information from digital texts if we want to prepare them for today’s society. Therefore, the debate should focus not so much on what media are best for learning, print or digital, but on what our students need to learn. There is a need to prepare students for “the changing demands of new electronic literacies in a globally competitive world” (Leu, 2000, p. 748). In addition, UNESCO notifies us that:

*To live, learn, and work successfully in an increasingly complex, information-rich and knowledge-based society, students and teachers must utilize technology effectively. (ICT Competency Standards for Teachers, UNESCO, 2008, p. 1)*

Furthermore, mobile devices are nowadays learning tools. Research shows that learning takes place everywhere and that young students use these devices for informal learning (Levinsen & Sørensen, 2008). Since students increasingly read digital texts for their courses, we need to support their reading process in the digital media. Their success in learning depends on their ability to understand and use the information in these texts.

According to Perfetti, Landi, & Oakhill (2005), reading comprehension “occurs as the reader builds a mental representation of a text message” (p. 228).

Research evidence indicates that there is a positive relationship between the use of metacognitive awareness of reading strategies and foreign reading ability (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). Raising students’ awareness of the various cognitive and metacognitive strategies that they can use for reading will enable them to choose the appropriate strategies for better comprehension. These strategies are also crucial in comprehending e-material (Verezub & Wang, 2008).

In order to help students to be aware of their reading skills teachers can help them to model reading strategies. For example, think-aloud is an approach that relies on the teacher’s help to model, for students, metacognitive strategies such as activating background knowledge, inferring the meaning and monitoring. In the think-aloud approach, the teacher verbalizes what she is thinking while she is reading, as it is important to visualize that reading is an active process in which we actively construct meaning from the text based on our existing knowledge. We need to give students more tools for text comprehension and encourage them to be active in the process of reading, that is to say, students should use reading strategies as they read such as asking questions about the content, identifying the main ideas or testing the logic and credibility of a text. Technology can also help the learner by modelling such reading strategies as the teacher does in the think-aloud approach. That is to say, technology can take the role of the teacher as mediator.

Being aware of one’s thought process is important in face-to-face teaching but perhaps even more so in e-learning where the e-learning design leaves students with a higher degree of autonomy. In e-learning, it is essential for students to self-evaluate and monitor their knowledge. For example, Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) are fairly well established in education and increasingly teachers are creating much digital material for uploading to the VLE. The development of students’ autonomy in using digital material is essential. For students to develop digital compe-