Five Trends in Literacy and Technology from Submissions from Reading Online

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As we write this, our term as journal editors of the International Reading Association’s professional electronic journal, Reading Online, is coming to an end. June 2003 will see the final issue of the journal under our editorship, and we approach the end of our work with mixed feelings. On one hand, editing the journal has been a labor of love. We have had the privilege of working with our amazing department editors (click to view slide) and with authors who have brought us intellectual excitement and professional growth. We have worked closely with the outstanding professionals at IRA headquarters who assist with so many aspects of the journal. And we have come to be close colleagues and personal friends with each other over the almost four years of our association. On the other hand, as we disclose our final responsibilities, we do so with sadness, knowing that the journal we edited is changing in ways that we cannot yet envision. IRA’s new plans for electronic services will see the establishment of a new portal called Reading Online, and the peer-reviewed content will remain. The rest of the journal will evolve as IRA places most of its electronic services onto the portal. We are privileged to be a part of the Electronic Services Committee charged with transforming the site. At this time, however, Reading Online as we know it, will cease to exist.

The electronic journal is the only one of the publications of IRA that has no paper existence. Its establishment in 1997 was the culmination of an extraordinary vision and the combined efforts of an incredibly visionary and talented team. For the first three years, ROL existed primarily as a publication website, under the editorship of Martha Dillner and her team. As we took on the editorship in June 2000, our charge was to expand on the very promising start made by the Dillner editorial team and cultivate the journal by increasing submissions, increasing the readership, adhering to a regular production schedule, and building the reputation of Reading Online. In collaboration with our editorial team, we were able to accomplish these goals. Of course, there are areas where we would have liked to realize greater progress, such as publishing more examples of innovative hypermedia composition. We are optimistic that will take place in future online publications.

Reading Online has a mission statement that has formed the foundation of our editorship:

Reading Online is a journal of classroom practice and research for K-12 educators. It is intended to help readers become more attuned to using technology effectively for classroom instruction, and to understanding new literacies and the
impact of these on teaching practice and student learning. The journal is designed
to foster the exchange of ideas and the development of networks among readers
and authors through discussion in the electronic environment. Peer-reviewed
articles published in Reading Online will focus on a broad range of topics in
literacy education, but should have practical applications and demonstrate sound
pedagogical principles.

As of October 2002, we reported that

- 16% of all article-length content published since May 1997 is peer reviewed
- Under the current editors, 17% of content has been peer reviewed (10% in
  2000-01, and 23% in 2001-02)
- 66% of all content published since May 1997 and 70% of peer-reviewed
  articles focus on K-12 instruction; the remaining content focuses outside the
  journal’s mission on teacher education (with little or highly limited relevance
to K-12 educators) or preschool
- 63% of content and 56% of peer-reviewed articles focus on technology and
  new literacies
- Under the current editors, 71% of all content and 62% of peer-reviewed
  articles focus on K-12 instruction
- Under the current editors, 65% of all content and 54% of peer-reviewed
  articles focus on technology and new literacies

With regard to an increase in readership, this has been one of the highlights of our
editorship. Site traffic is strong and has increased significantly during the current editorial
term. The large majority of site visitors come from the United States. Readership has
increased dramatically. The most popular sections of the site in its current configuration
are (in this order) Articles, Electronic Classroom, New Literacies, International
Perspectives and From the Editors, From Years Past (archival material including
discontinued Research, Critical Issues, and Reviews sections from the Dillner editorship),
and Online Communities.

Because all content published on the Reading Online site remains available to the
reader in archives (and is always free of charge), many past publications remain popular.
However, each month, the most popular individual articles or features are consistently
those from the current issue. These appear on the contents listing of the home page, as
well on the individual listings of each section. As we track the readership we see page
views that increase. For example, it is not uncommon for articles to have thousands of
page views. See the following table (October 2002) for a breakdown of articles and
features that have been viewed more than 1500 times in any single month.

**Figure 1**

**Articles and Features Viewed More Than 1500 Times in Any Single Month,**
February 2001 to May 2002
2. Wilkinson, L., & Silliman, E., “Classroom Language and Literacy Learning” (invited article in the series of chapter summaries from the *Handbook of Reading Research*) (3392)
3. Ash, G.E., “Teaching Readers Who Struggle: A Pragmatic Middle School Framework” (peer-reviewed article) (2897)
5. Cammack, D., “Two Sites for Struggling or Reluctant Readers” (Electronic Classroom, invited Web Watch) (2698)
6. Burgess, S., “Shared Reading Correlates of Early Reading Skills” (peer-reviewed article) (2535)
7. Pressley, M., “Comprehension Instruction” (invited article in the *Handbook* series) (2516)
8. Guthrie, J., “Contexts for Engagement and Motivation in Reading” (invited article in the *Handbook* series) (2475)
9. Curtis, M., & Longo, A.M., “Teaching Vocabulary to Adolescents to Improve Comprehension” (invited article for themed issue on struggling readers) (2091)
10. Johnson, D., “Internet Resources to Assist Teachers Working with Struggling Readers” (Electronic Classroom, invited Web Watch) (2064 views)
11. Dalton, B., & Grisham, D.L., “Introduction to a Themed Issue on Struggling Readers” (From the Editors feature) (2031)
12. Dalton, B., “Twenty Online Resources on Reading with Comprehension and Engagement” (From the Editors feature) (1940 views)
13. Balajthy, E., Reuber, K., & Robinson, C., “Teachers’ Use of Technology in a Reading Clinic” (peer-reviewed article) (1939)
15. Turbill, J., “The Language Used to Teach Literacy: An Activity for Teachers” (International Perspectives department feature) (1670)
16. Casey, J., “Technology Empowers Reading and Writing of Young Children” (invited short feature, Electronic Classroom) (1665)
18. Commeyras, M., “The Improvisational in Teaching Reading” (peer-reviewed article) (1650 views)
19. Tancock, Susan M., “Reading, Writing, and Technology: A Healthy Mix in the Social Studies Curriculum” (peer-reviewed article) (1584 views)
20. Johnson, D., “Picture Book Read-Alouds” (Electronic Classroom web watch) (1558)
In other words, the sheer volume of readership of the journal tends to assure the author that his or her work will be read by many people and that we, as editors, can provide specific figures. This is important since often RTP depends upon the impact of one’s publications. Our records reflect that in June 2000, when our first issue went “live” ROL had 134,868 page views, with 36,999 sessions at 6.27 minutes each. By May 2002, that had increased to 278,236 page views, with 51,431 sessions at 7.12 minutes each. In a recent issue we topped 400,000 page views and the sessions and session times continue to increase. “Views” represents the number of pages accessed, including any graphics, etc., that might appear on those pages. “Sessions” refers to the number of distinct visits to the site.

Trends We Have Seen

As we began to look back over our time as editors we noted several trends in the submissions to the journal that we note below. These encouraging trends reassure us that what we are doing is important work and we offer these to you as evidence that the outlet for work embracing the intersection of literacy and technology is necessary and that the need should continue to increase over the next few years. As technology evolves, we see the role of a journal such as Reading Online increasing in value, both for contributors and for readers.

Increasing Sophistication in Submissions for Peer Review

In looking over the journal content for the past two and a half years, the first trend we have noted is an increasing sophistication in the submissions for peer-review. First, the form of the content has evolved technologically. Since July 2002, only three articles have been published that could have been published in print form only without the need for technology available in Reading Online. Two aspects distinguish the articles we have published

Technology in service of traditional literacies. Articles that make the point that technology can be used to teach traditional literacies include those where the author substitutes software for reading, writing, or presentation task. Some important examples include:

Denise Johnson’s webwatches that provide online sources for teachers (poetry, struggling readers, literature, etc.) A particularly interesting excerpt is on poetry (Johnson, 2002, Online Document).
Martha Dillner’s peer-reviewed article on using technology flexibly in composing (Dillner, 2001, Online Document).

Karen Bromley’s “Vocabulary Learning Online” (Bromley, 2002, Online Document).

Another good example is Susan Tancock’s article on using technology in the social studies (Tancock, 2002, Online Document).

Technology in service of new literacies. Articles in this category use technology in ways that extend the definitions of literacy. An example of this is Susan Deysher’s webwatches in the new 21st Century Literacies (Deysher, 2003, Webpage), and the publication of many articles in the new literacies department. For example, we like Maya Eagleton’s roadmap of electronic literacy (Eagleton, 2002, Online Document).

Also check out Kevin Leander and Lois Duncan’s piece on “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun: Literacy, Consumerism, and Paradoxes of Position on gURL.com” (Duncan & Leander, 2000, Online Document).

Expanding Definitions of Literacy

Expanding definitions of literacy are apparent throughout the journal, but especially in our New Literacy department. Examples include John McEaneaney’s hypertext article “Ink to Link: A Hypertext History in 36 Nodes” (McEaneaney, 2000, Online Document). In this piece, you will learn the difference between hypertext and linear composition and reading! We also refer you Choi and Ho’s, “Exploring New Literacies in Online Peer-Learning Environments” (Choi & Ho, 2002, Online Document). Ann Watts Paillotet’s many contributions cannot be overstated on this topic (Hammer & Kellner, 2001, Online Document). Editor Dana Grisham’s editorial on the need for teachers’ increased attention to media literacy is also pertinent (Grisham, 2001, Online Document) as is Karyn Au’s “Culturally Responsive Instruction as a Dimension of New Literacies” (Au, 2001, Online Document). We also refer you to Jamie Myers and Rick Beach’s piece on critical literacy (Myers & Beach, 2001, Online Document).

Teachers’ Increasing Interest and Competence in Technology

Readership statistics bear out classroom teachers’ increasing interest and competence in technology. What is going on in teachers’ classrooms is far more sophisticated as evidenced by our Teachers’ Voices feature in the articles section. Here is a short list of the wonderful diversity of topics covered in this section:

- Literacy, the American Revolution, and the Three R's of Our Fight for Freedom: An Interview with Judy McAllister and Erica Lussos
- An Interview with Roxie Ahlbrecht About Writing, Technology, and the "Apple Bytes" Project
Technology as a Vehicle for Teacher Education

Technology as a vehicle for teacher education has appeared over and over again in the journal. Teacher educators are doing more with online resources. We suggest that if you have second language learners you might refer to Jill Kerper Mora’s website (Mora, 2000, Online Document).

However, most of the articles on teacher education concern two strands:

Technology that connect preservice teachers with kids/teachers. Jerry Maring’s three articles use technology for communications and learning between preservice teachers and students in K-12 schools. Check out his second article for cybermentoring techniques (Maring, Levy, & Schmid, 2002, Online Document). Some of the Teacher’s Voices series are of great assistance to other teachers and teacher educators in providing exemplars of what teachers, acting for the most part on their own initiative can do to connect literacy and technology in their classrooms. We particularly like Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad: Bringing Social Studies to Life (Strangman, 2002, Online Document).

Simulated problem-solving experiences. A good example of this is Michael Kibby’s work on the reading clinic with simulations for teachers who wish to become reading specialists (Kibby & Scott, 2002, Online Document). Several authors also explore the utility of online courses. Kara Tabor and Jane Slater Meyers, provide a new look at web-driven coursework in “RISE: The Online Professional Development Choice for Secondary Teachers” (Tabor & Meyers, 2002, Online Document).

A Continuing Interest in Struggling Readers

As editors, we surveyed our readers about their interests. The widespread interest and frustration with teaching struggling readers topped the list for the survey and led to a themed issue on the topic. In addition to the themed issue, we have published a number of articles and webwatches on this topic, including Editor Bridget Dalton’s extremely popular “20 Websites for Struggling Readers” (Dalton, 2001, Online Document).
An Interest in Intermediate and Middle Level Education

Our readers are interested in intermediate and middle level education, especially functional/content area instruction, and we have published substantial content in this area. Maya Eagleton’s work on e’zeens (Eagleton, 2002, Online Document), Spires and Cuper’s “Literacy Junction: Cultivating Adolescents' Engagement in Literature Through Web Options,” (Spires & Cuper, 2002, Online Document) and Gwynne Ellen Ashe’s “Teaching Readers Who Struggle: A Pragmatic Middle School Framework,” (Ashe, 2002, Online Document) are just a few of the selections. More recently, David O’Brien’s work with adolescent learners highlights that young adolescents who may be disengaged from regular texts may remain engaged in digital and multimedia texts and makes an argument for using the new literacies (O’Brien, 2003, Online Document).

New Players!

Technology is bringing new players to the game, and they are making contributions that we can only begin to appreciate at the moment. Many important innovations are happening outside of the traditional literacy community of teachers and researchers. For three important examples, see “Multimedia Pedagogy and Multicultural Education for the New Millennium” by Rhonda Hammer and Douglas Kellner (Hammer & Kellner, 2001, Online Document) and Ron Silverblatt’s “Media Literacy in an Interactive Age” (Silverblatt, 2000, Online Document) and “Visual Education” by Paul Messaris (Messaris, 2001, Online Document).

Final Thoughts

Reinking and colleagues characterized the current epoch in literacy as a “post-typographic” world, the implications of which we have yet to understand and appreciate. As we document the trends of a journal that we believe has been on the cutting edge of the intersection between literacy and technology, we are pleased to have been a part of it and we look forward to the next chapters of the story.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their enormous contributions to Reading Online: Department Editors Chuck Kinzer (Electronic Classroom), Jan Turbill and Larry Miller (International Perspectives), Ann Watts Pailliiolet, Ladislaus Semali, Patricia Ruggiano Schmidt, and Margaret Haygood (New Literacies), Gary Moorman and Kenneth Weiss (Online Communities); Advisory Council members Donald J. Leu, William Henk and Jan Turbil; the members of the Editorial Review Board; and Anne Fullerton, Managing Editor of Electronic Services, International Reading Association.
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