

# Reading on the web is not really reading

- 1 For anyone looking honestly at the American intellectual landscape today, it is impossible to escape the fear that something has gone badly wrong with ‘diffusion of knowledge throughout the community’ – even though, ironically, the internet offers the most powerful tool ever invented for the spread of education. And everything that has gone wrong has gone particularly wrong among the young.
- 2 The standard political approach from both Democrats and Republicans has been to blame undeniable educational deficiencies on bad schools and bad teachers. The ‘No Child Left Behind Act’, a centrepiece of President George W. Bush’s domestic agenda, mandates standardised tests and evaluates teachers and schools based on the test scores. But the chief effect seems to have been to force teachers to devote disproportionate time to stuffing students with soon-to-be-forgotten facts for the state-approved quizzes. The same teenagers falter when confronted with an international examination designed, as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) test is, to assess their ability to apply scientific facts to real-life problems.
- 3 Among Americans aged 18 to 24, four out of ten never read any books – fiction or non-fiction – unless required for work or school. As for news, the majority of people under 30 are not paying attention at all. According to a study conducted by the journal *Television Quarterly*, only one in 12 adults under 30 reads a daily newspaper. Television newscasts are watched by one in six. Those figures are no surprise, but the study also 20 that the young have simply shifted their news-gathering to the web. In fact, only one out of eight Americans under 30 regularly reads news on the internet. Approximately half of men from 18 to 34, by contrast, spend nearly three hours a day playing video games.
- 4 It is hardly surprising that in 2006, three years into Iraq war, nearly two thirds of adults aged between 18 and 24 were unable to find Iraq on a map marked with the names of countries – meaning that they did not have the slightest idea of where in the world to look. 22 was another finding from the same poll, conducted by *National Geographic-Roper*. Nearly half of young Americans do not think it necessary to know the location of other countries in which important news is being made. It is ignorant not to know where your country is fighting a war, but it is arrogant and anti-rational to insist that such ignorance does not matter.
- 5 One of the more heated debates in the US today is whether ‘reading’ on the internet bears any resemblance to reading in the traditional sense. A horde of technophile writers and scholars (most of whom owe their living to the ‘new media’) predictably promotes the notion that worries about the decline of reading are confined to fuddy-duddy Luddites<sup>1)</sup>. A recent article in the *New York Times* (coily headlined, ‘Literacy Debate: Online, R U Really Reading?’) quoted Donna E. Alverman, a professor of language and literacy education at the University of Georgia, who said that young people ‘are using sound and images so that they have a world of ideas to put together that aren’t necessarily language oriented’. What codswallop!

- 6 A more revealing comment in the same article came from a high-school student, Hunter Gaudet, who observed that he never read books unless forced to do so and said that ‘they go through a lot of details that aren’t really needed’. He added, ‘Online just gives you what you need, nothing more or less.’
- 7 American foundations and businesses are now spending huge amounts of money to develop more ‘educational’ video games, so that schools will not have to depend on pesky books with ‘details’ that aren’t really needed. The Federation of American Scientists, an organisation best known for advising the government on national security issues, issued a widely publicised report titled ‘Harnessing the Power of Video Games for Learning’. The document was released in conjunction with the Entertainment Software Corporation, a public relations group promoting video games that has cornered roughly 90 per cent of the \$7 billion gaming market worldwide.
- 8 Of course, the empire of infotainment knows no national boundaries, and neither do the knowledge deficits promoted by the decline of reading. There are several reasons why the dumbing down of American culture ought to worry people in parts of the world that are still behind the US on the ignorance curve. First and most obvious, there is the elephant-in-the-room factor. If the US turns to video games to address classroom problems created, in significant measure, by children’s addiction to video, only a nanosecond will pass before education establishment Pooh Bahs<sup>2)</sup>, in the UK and elsewhere, start pushing school-sponsored video games, in the absence of any evidence of their utility, as a way to improve student performance.
- 9 A more subtle factor is the impossibility of conducting informed discourse, nationally or internationally, when most of the public has lost its ability to follow a narrative. In our culture of distraction, more and more people cannot remember what they knew only a year ago – much less what happened five years ago.
- 10 This intellectual crisis – it is not too strong a word – clearly transcends politics. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in a visionary 1837 speech at Harvard known as the ‘American Scholar’ oration, declared that ‘the mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself’. This line resonates even more strongly today, when the low objects are purveyed along an infotainment highway that fragments memory and encourages confusion between information and the genuine framework of knowledge essential to turning isolated facts (and errors) into a reasoned civic dialogue.

*Susan Jacoby in The Spectator, 2008*

noot 1 Luddites: people who oppose technical or technological change.

noot 2 Pooh Bahs: persons in high position or of great influence.

## Tekst 7 Reading on the web is not really reading

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- 1p **18** Which of the following is stated in paragraph 1?
- A** Access to the internet has not resulted in widespread knowledge among the general public in the US.
  - B** American academics do not regard the internet as an inexhaustible source of knowledge.
  - C** Especially young Americans are being adversely affected by the temptations of the internet.
  - D** So far the internet has not realised its potential as an infinite storing place of knowledge.
- 2p **19** Geef van elk van de onderstaande beweringen aan of deze wel of niet overeenstemt met de inhoud van alinea 2.
- 1 Politicians on both sides of the spectrum blame education for the poor economic situation of the US.
  - 2 The Bush government tried to improve school results by institutionalising educational measurement.
  - 3 Emphasis on factual knowledge has impaired American students' capacity to put their knowledge to practical use.
- Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".
- 1p **20** Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 3?
- A** confirms the hypothesis
  - B** explodes the myth
  - C** highlights the assumption
  - D** ignores the belief
- 1p **21** Which of the following could the first sentence of paragraph 4 also begin with?
- A** Accordingly, it ...
  - B** However, it ...
  - C** In reality, it ...
- 1p **22** Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 4?
- A** Even more significant
  - B** In clear contrast to this
  - C** Less promising

- 1p 23 Which of the following is in accordance with the contents of paragraphs 5 and 6?
- A Donna E. Alverman argues that sound and images reinforce young people's reading strategies.
  - B Hunter Gaudet remarks that books often leave out the kind of information that online reading provides.
  - C Technophiles claim that reading skills are not affected by the internet.
  - D The writer of the article feels that online reading comes close to the traditional way of reading.
- 1p 24 Wat suggereert de schrijver in de laatste zin van alinea 7 met betrekking tot het rapport "Harnessing the Power of Video Games for Learning"?
- 1p 25 Which of the following is in agreement with the contents of paragraph 8?
- A American cultural developments will inevitably influence other countries.
  - B Some countries are even more affected by a decline in reading than the US.
  - C The use of video games in the classroom only increases children's addiction to video.
- "A more subtle factor" (at the beginning of paragraph 9)
- 1p 26 A factor relating to which of the following?
- A The attraction of video games.
  - B The declining level of general knowledge.
  - C The fall of reading standards.
  - D The improvement of student performance.
- 1p 27 What view does Emerson's observation about "the mind" (paragraph 10) serve to illustrate?
- The "infotainment highway"
- A contributes to subjects of minor importance becoming nationwide topics of discussion.
  - B has an adverse effect on countries with a less advanced educational system.
  - C provides the information necessary for an intelligent and interesting conversation.
  - D undermines the process of building up a solid and coherent structure of knowledge.

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**Bronvermelding**

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