

Report of the meeting of WG3 on October 19-20 in Tallinn

Main theme of WG3 meeting in Tallinn (October 18-19): Current state of reading and writing on screen across Europe

There were four presentations of WG3 members in which core issues were:

- (1) Growing use of technology/tablets in preschool/kindergarten
- (2) Software available and in construction for young age groups
- (3) Quality of reading programs
- (4) Advantages and disadvantages of digital books

Presentations

Charles Mifsud from Malta presented the one-tablet-per-child project in Malta. This is a political decision with large consequences for education of all 7-8-yr-olds. Maltese education aims at dual literacy, that is in Maltese and English. The inclusion of technology in 7 education for 7 onward promotes true curricular integration, and not simply 'add-ons' to instruction. He carried out an ethnographic study in five classes with 7-year-olds which revealed positive moments suggesting that technology improves learning and instruction (Malta TabLit study).

Izabela and Slawomir from Poland presented about one classroom of mandatory preschool education equipped with tablets for every child, initiated by an in-service teacher. We caught glimpses of software (letter forms, puzzles) as developed by the same teacher. Authors reported improvement of involvement and concentration.

Iris Susana Pires Pereira presented Portuguese projects and software targeting reading and writing on screen, mostly not yet researched but certainly of potential interest. In so far researched the focus has been on age 6 and onwards.

Jan van Coillie from Leuven briefly described ongoing research with a questionnaire to test how children perceive advantages and disadvantages of reading on screen.

Adriana Bus from Leiden University discussed several approaches to the WG3 theme:

1. **Content analysis** of programs/apps that are in use in our countries thereby signaling communalities and differences across countries
2. Basic **research** into how programs/apps for on screen reading and writing affect early reading and early writing, with a specific interest in new theories of early reading and early writing in the digital age
3. **Review** of research into effects of programs/apps for on screen reading and writing synthesizing research findings

Key research questions put forward in the presentations and discussed in the WG3 meeting in Tallinn

1. What do we mean when we refer to reading and writing on screen from 0-8? How does the new communicative context redefine our understanding of reading and writing?
2. Which programs/apps are in use to promote early literacy, what are core features that distinguish programs/apps from reading on paper, and which new qualities promote/hinder literacy?
3. Do programs/apps have qualities especially useful for prevention of learning problems?

Other questions not discussed in Tallinn but probably of interest:

4. We need to create learning programs to support families and make high-quality learning environments the norm from birth through elementary school but to what extent are age-appropriate programs/apps to stimulate early literacy available across countries? And in so far available do they follow best design principles?
5. For this we need to specify whether or not programs/apps cover main aspects of literacy development. Important issues might be whether or not programs/apps are available in local languages (versus English)? Is practice age-appropriate?
6. How can we promote that society invests in early learning programs to support families and make high-quality learning environments the norm from birth to elementary school? Who develops programs/apps and can we involve them in the discussion?

Follow-up steps

1. Content analysis of programs/apps available in European countries and making a comparison across countries
2. Inventory of programs/apps preferred by teachers across countries
3. Analyze 'paid' and free educational apps targeting Kids, Books, Education and Educational, Word, Family Games in *iTunes App Store* and Books and References, Education, Family Games, Word Games and Educational Games in *Google Play Store* as well as programs/apps favored by teachers. Questions: frequency of educational apps as compared to entertainment? Relevant for language and literacy learning? Content domain? Available in target languages?
4. Involving publishers/industry in new steps with the aim to narrow gaps?