04 *Exploration on Network Reading*

Modern people must possess two "Brains": one is inside the body and the other is beside. Modern people walk on the road and, in the network as well — being led and hovered about inside by electronic network. In fact, we are in the age of widespread and interconnecting networks. Network reading becomes an indispensable part of our life.

Universal network and network reading

The 17th Statistical Reports on the Internet Development in China (China Internet Network Information Centre, 2006) reported that there were 111.00 million internet users in China. According to the "Macao Internet Research Plan" investigation (Cheung Weng Hin 2007) , the commonplace rate for internet users in Macao was 55% at the closing date for the survey in December 2006 and there were 260 thousands internet users. Investigation on usage situation and degree of commonplace of Hong Kong information technology (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2007) revealed that approximately 1.58 million families in Hong Kong had installed internet accessible computers in 2007. This figure represented 70.1% of total families in Hong Kong. Approximately 3.96 million internet users were below the age of 10 which was 64.8% of the citizen in this age range. The above data was two years ago. Today, internet surfing in all places must be more commonplace and more passionate.

What are the general activities of internet users? These activities include browser searching, website surfing, web records reading and writing, chat room conversation, online games, online video and music, e-mail and information transfer, file transfer, electronic face to face conference etc. When performing these activities, network users need to "use eyes", "use ears", "use hands", and "use mouths". Among all "use eyes" is especially important. The reading process includes watching pictures, browsing websites, inspecting information and reading characters in detail which is also known as network reading. Besides characters and symbols, video information often accompanies network information. Therefore network reading is more diversified and complicated than printings reading.

Comments on network reading

Ray Perryman (1997) said, "Reading media is experiencing a revolution, from printings media to network media. There are many comments on this "revolution", especially on materials and applications relating to network reading."

The four big problems on network information

Burbules and Callister (2000) pointed out the following four kinds of problems relating to contents of network information and the materials for network reading:

1. Untrue information: Inside network, there were false, overdue and incomplete information which misled readers easily;
2. Unhealthy information: Inside network, there was some malicious information e.g. the methods of making bombs, low taste video and information which brought enmity and violence;
3. Confused information: Inside network, there was information which was organized confusedly and expressed unclearly;
4. Useless information: Inside network, there was a great deal of useless information.

Undoubtedly, the world of network is an information space which is not fortified and is opened to public. Different kinds of websites are formed, renewed and connected continually. The above four problems do exist. Network readers must confront them and heighten their alertness. But we cannot totally negate the contents of network information for those reasons. In fact, network brings many true, diversified, fresh, multi-media information and knowledge and strong communication functions which have great benefit to network readers.

The disadvantage and benefit of network reading

Many scholars had pointed out the drawbacks of network reading (Roszak, 1994; Postman, 1993, 1995; Stoll, 1995; Talbott, 1995; Birkerts, 1994). They believed that, network reading made the readers lingering around materials which were attractive but empty of meaning. Even if there were good articles, readers would not stop and read in detail. Moreover readers would not read the articles from beginning to the end and rarely analyse it with care. Lei Sao Chu believed that articles in network inclined to be frivolous, short and small, not deep enough and with too much connection. Thus it led readers to take a ski form of reading and pass details easily.

But still, to compare with printings reading, there are many benefits in network reading:

1. "More democratic": printing reading materials are predominated by writers. Writers control the contents and view of language. Readers have to accept by following the creation desire of the writers. In opposition, network readers can integrate, collaborate, participate and put into opinion through network. In this way, readers can change the reading contents and need not follow the tight and close instructions of writers and have more space to bring in and develop ideas (Birkets, 1994).
2. "Learners more to be at the centre ": To compare with printing materials, network allows readers to decide for themselves to be close to information, to have free communication; to learn from network according to his needs; to select information and knowledge for building his own knowledge structure.

3. "More comprehensive": In opposition to printing materials, network can provide information from more resources, angles and viewpoints, allowing readers to know the events, state of affairs and realities more comprehensively.

4. "More natural": because network displays video, pictures, symbols, sound and versions which reflects closer to reality situation than printing versions, it allows readers to perceive directly through their senses and read the content. It is exactly as Warschauer (2003) said, "Natural marks like pictures, animation and video can display "Natural" effectively."

5. "More practical": Network information includes everything, e.g. practical articles, real time news and other language and video which have practical communication functions. All these can make readers fall into the real world and real situation of language.

To conclude all the above, network reading, the new media, provides beneficial resources and conditions for reading. Of course, we need to pay attention to the associated problems and drawbacks.

Use network reading properly

Network reading has become an modern people living and learning mode which cannot be overlooked. What should we do to prepare well for this?

To strengthen reading ability

For network reading we need to have computer knowledge and skills. But, reading ability is still very important. The reading skills which we learn from reading printed materials are still effective (Shetzer, Heidi & Warschauer, Mark, 2000). For example, when we face mass information and information connected from different directions, we need to apply the skills of speed reading, brief reading, selective reading on network. When we face texts in network, we need to apply all the ways of reading to differentiate works; to grasp the meanings of the sentences; to understand parable and to deduce the keynotes of sections and chapters and to grasp the position and points of view of writers. Facing multi-media, e.g connected charts, video and sound, we can use the following strategies: estimation, points writing, conceptual pictures and connected introspections. Therefore the common place between network reading and printing reading is that readers can use the reading methods and strategies learned from printings reading and network reading to train the reading ability of their own. In this way, network reading will not become superficial and careless.

To promote thinking ability

There are four problems in network information. They are "untrue", "unhealthy", "confused" and "useless". Network readers must cultivate high level of thinking abilities which include the mentality of criticism and creation. As Burbules and Callister (2000) pointed out that criticism reading included: to analyse whether the websites are believable; to think what are the ways of expression; to inspect the viewpoint of web pages contents; to find out what kind of information is omitted; to decide the position and standpoint of the representative organization of web pages. In the meantime, readers needed to understand the differences between information and knowledge. After grasping mass information, we needed to consolidate, conclude, analyse, enhance and change information into knowledge (Warschauer, 2003). All these need both criticism and creation mentality. In this way, we will not be cheated and adopt others thoughts instead of using our own.

To enhance the sense of morality

Network is an area without shield. Inside network, there are anti-moral information and conducts which include pornographic information and conduct of tort etc. Besides using criticism mentality for distinguishing, network readers need to enhance the individual sense of morality, understand the standard and specification on common living conducts in the society so as to build up an individual positive character on their own initiative. If readers can respect themselves and the rights of others, protect the benefits of individual and community, unhealthy information is not easy to spread and as a result, unhealthy moral conduct will not proliferate too.

Concluding remarks

Reading enters into the era of network. It is irreversible. Even there are many problems on network reading, but the functions cannot be obliterated. Therefore, we have to know it more comprehensively. We need to start from three ways: reading ability, thinking ability and sense of morality to well equip ourselves to welcome this fruitful, diversified and numerous network world.

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Excerpted from "Lifelong Learning Magazine" 14th Issue, February 2009