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Reading with depth

130 researchers dedicated to the topic of reading have concluded that screens and paper are not equivalent as a reading medium. They have manifested this in the Stavanger Declaration.

The corona pandemic has given digitalization a considerable boost – for a long time, working from home was not the exception but almost the rule. Pupils and students were assigned to home schooling or home learning and contact with authorities and doctors was largely moved online. Both a challenging and instructive time for all of us.

We will certainly take the one or other insight gained from this, such as the fact that we do not need to get on a plane for every meeting, with us into the post-corona age – and that is a good thing. However, in education, too, the distance learning and studying that has now begun will continue in one form or another. During the corona crisis, governments finally mustered up the strength to equip schools with the necessary digital infrastructure.

Books must not be replaced indiscriminately

However, it is necessary to consider the matter in a more differentiated manner because merely digitalizing school operations cannot eliminate structural problems. In fact, there is a risk that cultural skills such as reading will fall by the wayside. A light has been shone on this, among other things, by 130 reading researchers from more than 30 countries in the [Stavanger Declaration](#).

The researchers warn of a possible “delay in the development of children’s reading comprehension and the development of critical thinking”, especially if printed books, exercise books and pens in primary school are rapidly and, above all, indiscriminately replaced with digital tools. They continue to advocate the reading of printed books, which should also be taken into account in future curricula.

Too much distraction from digital media

The researchers summarized 54 studies into a meta study with 17,000 participants and deduced that the understanding of longer information texts is much better when reading on paper than on a monitor, in particular when readers are pressed for time. When it comes to narrative texts, however, no major differences were found.

When reading digital texts, in particular, many people overestimate their ability to comprehend and understand, which in turn tempts them to skim over the texts and has a negative effect on their concentration. What is more, smartphones, tablets, but also computers simply have too many functions such as push notifications, which distract the reader and make in-depth reading all the more difficult. What is astonishing in this context is that this tendency has increased rather than decreased among “digital natives”, regardless of age and prior knowledge.

Skimming is becoming the standard

Maryanne Wolf, one of the signatories of the Stavanger Declaration, sees the danger that skimming over texts on a monitor will become the standard, which will sooner or later be transferred to reading printed texts. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate both forms of reading in the first classes of elementary school until the children at some point have internalized the two media well .

This is the only way of preventing reading habits being transferred from the monitor to printed books. It should be noted here that the authors of the Stavanger Declaration do not oppose progress, but merely encourage adequate guidance.

The joyful experience of reading

Digitalization is not a simple solution to problems that have always existed and will continue to exist. Reducing education to an iPad would likely be insufficient. Digital as well as printed media have their very specific strengths, which need to be visualized and incorporated. An understanding-driven and critically reflected reading of digital information texts – as well as the reading of printed texts – needs to be specifically learned and practiced. The earlier in life the better.

For young readers, in particular, it is important to encourage attention and the ability to concentrate in order to read longer and more complex texts in a meaningful way and not to simply skim over them with the swipe function. Losing yourself in texts, absorbing the content and immersing yourself in the role of the protagonist is an experience that only printed books can provide.

Read in this [interview](#) with Dr. Hans-Georg Häusel, Psychologist and pioneer of neuromarketing, why learning from books is more successful.

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