This case study examines the intersection of dyslexia, adolescence and ICT. Specifically, it investigates three things: firstly, the potential of ‘everyday’ online technologies including YouTube, Facebook and Twitter to complement or even supplant the specialist intervention technology traditionally used with and by dyslexic students; secondly, the appeal to this group of learners of audio-visual, multimodal technologies and their habitual use of multiple forms of ICT simultaneously - such patterns of skilful cross-domain work are similar to the way many teenagers and adults actually work, but are usually proscribed in the classroom (Davies & Pahl, 2007); and thirdly how ICT might encourage engagement with literacy and learning for students historically marginalised by dominant, ‘autonomous’ models of literacy (LeCourt, 2001; Street, 1984). These factors have significant pedagogical implications and epistemological challenges which require investigation (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). In particular, the renewed emphasis on the image, which presents a challenge to the dominance of the written word in education and elsewhere (Kress, 2000, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Jewitt, 2005), has potentially seismic consequences for a cohort of students who often instinctively think and work in visual ways, (Ehardt, 2008; von Karolyi et al, 2003; West, 2009) and often struggle with the demands of traditional alphabetic literacy. As such, multimodal technologies combining icons, graphics, video, audio and increasingly haptics with text have the potential to unsettle dominant deficit models of dyslexia (Moors 2004). Students with dyslexia are frequently encouraged to use visuo-spatial thinking and learning techniques like mindmaps, but it seems no-one has yet made the connection between what are known as ‘multisensory strategies’ in dyslexia circles (Moats & Farrell, 1991; Mousavi, Low & Sweller, 1995; Reid 2005, 2009) and ‘multimodal texts’ in the New Literacy Studies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). This study uses the conceptual frameworks of the New Literacy Studies and multimodality as sensitising concepts for the development of a grounded theory which attempts to explain the use of, and attitudes towards, online multimodal technologies for curriculum learning by sixth-form students with dyslexia. Through analysis of observation, interview, protocol analysis and artefact analysis data, the study seeks to derive the principles which motivate and actuate learning for these students. Teachers can then determine how to apply the principles pedagogically, without simply chasing “the new”, and utilising particular technologies for their own sake (Tompsett, 2007).

References


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