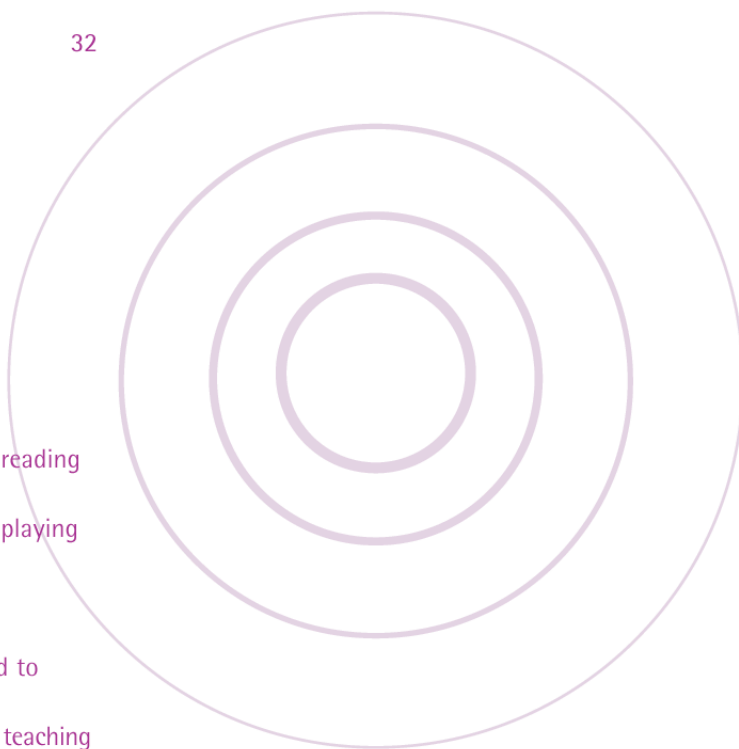


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Background to the Research

Reading habits are changing as reading increasingly involves the use of electronic sources and new technologies. The reading skills required for accessing information are also changing. Young children will already have developed skills from their experience with computers at home even before they come to school, although of course all children do not have equal access to the new technologies and new literacies at home. Teachers are seeking to build on these important skills as they extend children's reading repertoire in school. From 2005 - 2006 QCA conducted a conversation with teachers and other practitioners, pupils, governors, parents, local authority advisers, higher education lecturers and employers about the future of English. UKLA contributed wholeheartedly to the English 21 debate, particularly in the area of Texts and Technology. This is the context of a new collaboration between UKLA and QCA aimed at developing understanding about the learning potential of reading on screen.

Building on two earlier QCA/UKLA initiatives on multimodal texts which led to the publications, *More than Words 1* and *More than Words 2*, the research reported here examined on-screen reading in different curriculum areas in a range of school contexts with children in the 5 to 16 age range. The work documents the processes of teaching and learning involved in on-screen reading. Evidence is also drawn from children's out-of-school experiences of on-screen reading in order to understand the implications for how schools can bridge home and school learning.

Following the earlier work in applying the writing assessment focuses to multimodal texts, this research project examined the application of the reading assessment focuses to on-screen multimodal texts.

There were two main areas of work:

- Observing and describing the processes of children's on-screen reading
- Application of the reading strands to multimodal on-screen texts.

This report details the evidence gathered from teachers and practitioners in Birmingham, Croydon, Essex and Sunderland.

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Section 1 Introduction: Reading on Screen

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English teachers will need to teach a wider range of reading strategies including how to navigate non-linear types of text and help pupils to make choices about ways of reading different types of texts – on-screen and off.

English 21 Playback

As readers turn more frequently to electronic sources for information and entertainment, the skills of reading are under scrutiny. This has its implications for teaching. The amount of text is one challenge: there is far more visual information to process appearing in a variety of forms and through different media. The texts are often multimodal, made up of words and images but also including movement and animation, sound and colour. On-screen texts are designed to be navigated differently from the usual direction of reading a printed page of continuous text: top to bottom and left to right. Also, screen texts often invite interaction, moving between screens reached by hyperlinks.

In terms of content, much of the new screen-based reading landscape is made up of information texts which make different reading demands from narratives encountered on screen. In addition, there are issues of authorship and provenance to be considered. Screen-based texts do not have to go through an editorial process. Blogs, websites and chatsites are not susceptible to any critical scrutiny and 'information' which is little more than unconfirmed assertion can appear on any site. This means that attentive and critical readership is even more important as part of the young reader's repertoire (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003; Snyder, 2003). At the same time, 'media literacy' (Unsworth, 2001; Buckingham, 2003) and children's popular cultural preferences (Facer et al. 2003; Dowdall, 2006) are seen to contribute to what reading means in the 21st century.

There are, of course, texts specifically designed for screens which are part of children's reading experience but most of this takes place at home. Children read specially designed CDROMs or play computer games for their own pleasure (Sainsbury, 2000; Mackey, 2004) and whilst there is some indication that these are seen as important for the classroom (Beavis, 2000) they do not yet form part of the reading curriculum. One of the aims of this research was to investigate the processes of on-screen reading with a view to identifying skills and strategies which are already taught and which can be readily directed towards on-screen reading and those which may need to be introduced into the reading curriculum.

In terms of the skills and strategies of on-screen reading, Gunther Kress has provided some of the most influential thinking about the 'skills of the multimodal world of communication' where the reader has to pay attention to different modes in texts. He points out:

*It is not the form of reading which I was taught – sustained, concentrated attention over an extended period, reading where the only attention was to the text which was being read. By contrast, this is reading for specific purposes, for the information that I need now at this moment.... we may wish the young to learn my form of reading also; I am certain that it has benefits and rewards, and that it will remain essential at times. Such a form of reading now needs to be taught as a specialized task, not as *the* form of reading that defines what reading is (Kress, 2003a: 174). (editor's ellipsis; author's emphasis)*

However, it is not only that the screen and its associated hypertext possibilities offer different – and perhaps more 'open' – navigational pathways but that the reader has to make decisions about what Kress terms 'criteria of relevance' (Kress, 2003b). He sees this as:

a profound difference between the traditional page and its reading path and the new page – derived from the principles of the organisation of the screen – and its reading path. The former coded a clear path, which had to be followed. The task of reading lay in interpretation and transformation of that which was clearly there and clearly organised. The new task is that of applying principles of relevance to a page which is (relatively) open in its organisation and consequently offers a range of possible reading paths, perhaps infinitely many (Kress, 2003b: 149).

Such possibilities for reading require a reappraisal of teaching approaches.

Starting points for the research

The research sought to investigate whether the skills needed for reading paper-based texts are substantially different from reading screen-based texts. Five researchers carried out a variety of projects in four different areas, collecting evidence through surveys or questionnaires, pupil journals, videos of children interacting with screen texts, observation of practice and interviews with teachers, practitioners and children. Some used think-aloud protocols, procedures designed to capture children's thinking processes as they make decisions in the course of their on-screen reading. Others used more familiar semi-structured interview techniques. Each researcher focused on a small number of case study children although some drew on greater numbers for survey evidence.

One of the challenges of an initiative involving a diverse range of projects is to maintain coherence and consistency. In part this was achieved through snapshot initial surveys and interviews (see Appendixes 1 and 2). Also, the reading assessment focuses offered a common reference point for the researchers to describe the skills and strategies observed as children read on screen (See Fig. 1.1).

The data from the different projects were analysed in order to address the following questions:

- What skills and strategies are used as children read texts on screen?
- Can these be adequately described using the QCA reading assessment focuses?
- What teaching approaches might cater for the new range of reading?

The opportunity to triangulate so many varied sources of data has enabled the team to develop rich descriptions of children's engagement with on-screen texts, which illuminate the demands made by on-screen reading.

below: **Figure 1.1** *QCA reading assessment focuses*.

AF1	use a range of strategies, including accurate decoding of text, to read for meaning
AF2	understand, describe, select or retrieve information, events or ideas from texts and use quotation and reference to text
AF3	deduce, infer or interpret information, events or ideas from texts
AF4	identify and comment on the structure and organisation of texts, including grammatical and presentational features at text level
AF5	explain and comment on writers' use of language, including grammatical and literary features at word and sentence level
AF6	identify and comment on writers' purposes and viewpoints, and the overall effect of the text on the reader
AF7	relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts and literary traditions

Several of these assessment focuses align generally with recognised typologies of reading practices. Freebody and Luke argue that effective readers draw on a 'repertoire of practices' (Freebody and Luke, 1999:3) which allow them to:

- break the code of written texts (including recognizing the alphabet, sounds in words and spellings)
- participate in understanding and composing meaningful written, visual, and spoken texts... in relation to their available knowledge and their experiences of other cultural discourses, texts, and meaning systems
- use texts functionally ... understanding that these functions shape the way texts are structured, their tone, their degree of formality, and their sequence of components
- critically analyze and transform texts by acting on knowledge that texts are not ideologically natural or neutral (adapted from Freebody and Luke, 1999).

The assessment focuses also relate to recognizable features of comprehension teaching drawn from the research literature:

- Previewing/predicting
- Activating and building on prior knowledge
- Questioning the text
- Visualising and other sensory responses
- Inferring and drawing conclusions
- Determining importance
- Synthesising
- Empathising
- Summarising
- Adopting a critical stance. (Lewis, 2007)

It seemed suitable, then, to use the assessment focuses as a yardstick for exploring the skills and strategies of reading on screen and to relate these to the features of comprehension listed above in considering how teaching approaches might accommodate on-screen reading.