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Educational Knowledge Today and in the Past

Do you own a dictionary? No. Because you are moving with the times? Knowledge questions can be answered quickly on the Internet. Online encyclopedias are available in endless numbers and in many languages. But is this lexical knowledge, called general education, enough on electronic platforms?

Famous German TV presenter Günther Jauch (born in 1956) is said to have said that education cannot be downloaded. Yet it is not only now, in the two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, that there is talk of „digital education“. And that in this time of corona restrictions, some deficiencies are coming to light – not only at schools and offices. But what is „digital literacy“?

Home-schooling, home-entertainment, home-office

This is not limited to the acquisition of personal computers, tablets or smartphones, or the ability to order from an online store. Digitization can be found in all areas of life. Everyone is affected – whether young or old, professional or private. Home schooling, home entertainment and home office are terms that have entered everyday language. Above all, they are (substitute) actions in which different attempts are made to meet the demands of society and business.

As a result, internet data traffic is causing massive growth in corona restrictions, and consequently also in electricity consumption – with demand for regenerative energies. Above all, however, it is the expertise of the digital market that counts. Anyone who acquires digital

literacy, can write new software independently, is familiar with operating systems or can think his way into them, masters IT management and security, has the prerequisites for participation in today's professional life in the media world. The „digital natives“ are predestined for this. Or to put it another way: people of the generation who have grown up and are still growing up in the digital world.

„Digital Natives,“ „Printing Natives“

However, even the generation of „digital natives“ will not be able to do entirely without „accompanying texts“ in printed form. In order to sustainably consolidate a media revolution, didactics is required. Distance learning students and vocational apprentices of the 20th century gained experience with didactically well-prepared teaching materials in printed and bound versions. And those of the 21st century gain recommendably with look-upable instructions on paper, how they can take up the instruction for training and further training on electronic media „brain and exam-ready“. This way would also advantageously help elementary and high school students in home schooling.

[Thomas Kaufmann](#), professor of church history in Göttingen, wrote the book „Die Druckmacher,“ which hit bookstores earlier this year. In it, he describes how the „Luther generation“ unleashed the first media revolution. Gutenberg's invention of printing alone was not enough to change the world. It was the first „printing natives“ who brought it about. They included the printer Manutius (1449–1515), the humanist Erasmus (1466–1536), the graphic artist Dürer (1471–1528), and the theologians Luther (1483–1546) and Zwingli (1484–1531).

They used printing technology for their own purposes, including by means of defamation that was not always above reproach (quasi „fake news“ of the 16th century). They used pamphlets and tracts to draw attention to themselves and „market“ their causes. This media revolution and religious reformation represented not only a profound cultural change, but also a broad-based upheaval.

Perception through encyclopedias

We contemporaries have also been experiencing an upheaval for over 20 years. That's how old the online encyclopedia Wikipedia is. It is an unparalleled success story, if you take as a yardstick the most frequently accessed pages on the Internet – and in around 300 languages. But the negative consequence is also a yardstick, namely that the most respected, classically produced encyclopedias in the world have ceased publication.

The 21st edition of the 30-volume Brockhaus from 2005, weighing 70 kilograms and occupying 1.5 meters of shelf space, was definitely the last. Publisher Friedrich Arnold Brockhaus (1772–1823) first brought out an encyclopedia under his name in 1809 in eight volumes. Brockhaus is not considered the inventor of the encyclopedia, but he is one of the most famous publishers of this kind. Educational knowledge was the goal of reading the encyclopedia so that people could participate in good conversation and understand book content. In addition, „encyclopedic users“ were to become familiar with the world that lay beyond the everyday horizon.

When new publishers step into the breach

Since 2005 – another example – the „Oxford DNB“, known since 1885, has been updated and supplemented online. This „Oxford Dictionary of National Biography“, a mammoth work of 60 volumes of about 1,000 pages each, with a total of 55,000 biographies in an edition of 5,000 copies, was bound in dark blue linen for the last time in the fall of 2004. All volumes, which take up four meters on the bookshelf, were presented to the public in their entirety on a single day – a first for multi-volume encyclopedias. The paper for the total of 300 million

pages was supplied to the English printer by a Swiss paper mill.

For the „Fischer Weltalmanach“, an institution in the old Federal Republic of Germany, the 2019 edition marked the end of a 60-year epoch. It seemed that the once proud genre of the printed encyclopedia had finally come to an end in the German-speaking world. But not at all. Franckh-Kosmos Verlag stepped into the breach and started an annual publication of the paperback in a new layout and with richer content under the title „Der neue Kosmos Welt-Almanach & Atlas“ with the 2021 edition.

And what else?

Acquiring educational knowledge on the Internet is more arduous than one might think. The wheat must always be separated from the chaff. For teaching aids and encyclopedias, professional experts usually do the selective preparation. This does not rule out that the editorial teams of online encyclopedias approach the matter in a similar way. In my opinion, however, condensed forms on specific topics are easier to handle in print editions, such as my published „Diary of Bookbinding and Print Finishing“.

Admittedly, I am a „printing native“ and for this, some information from Internet sources was and is helpful in the preparation. And from the stories of 500 years, developers, publishers, printers and bookbinders may gain one or the other inspiration for their own business ideas.

Also gaining inspiration is seeking out the bouquinistes along the banks of the Seine in Paris. When the pandemic dies down, one should definitely pay a visit to these antiquarian bookshops. Even at the „risk“ of buying trouvailles there will leave a hole in your travel fund. What you can discover here from past times, not only works in French, is simply wonderful. The visual and haptic experiences alone could even make „digital natives“ go into raptures.

Go on a journey of discovery!

As the saying goes, travel educates. In this respect, real educational knowledge is acquired. Highly interesting travel destinations are also book villages in the remotest parts of the world. To find them, you can hardly avoid googling for them. A book village is a locality with few inhabitants, but with a relatively large number of book antiquarians – quasi books as a tourist promotion measure for an economic perspective. The first book village was brought to life in Wales in 1961.

So: Go on a voyage of discovery, one way or another. But also visits to regional bookstores and antiquarian bookshops will surprise you with educational knowledge.

Yours

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Retired specialist journalist and publisher of „Tagebuch der Buchbinderei und Druckweiterverarbeitung“ („Diary of Bookbinding and Print Finishing“); Volumes 1-3, 16th-18th centuries, will be published in 2021; Volume 4, 19th century, 240 pages, 175 illustrations, in February 2022; Volume 5 will cover the 20th century. Available from Müller-Martini customer [BoD Book on Demand](#), Norderstedt (Germany), or through any other bookstore (brick-and-mortar or online).