

**Contribution  
to the  
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Title: The Digital Reading Portal

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**INTRODUCTION.**

The Digital Reading Portal directly addresses the United Nations WSIS Tunis Agenda paragraph 53. The Tunis Agenda may not recognize that industrialized countries have serious 'language' needs which could be addressed by better use of ICT. Industrialized countries are battling with image-based information, and the withdrawal by children and adults from the traditions of reading in their own language.

In other research, it is estimated that hundreds of languages are lost each year around the world. And, now, ICT is entering regions.

Together, the issue is: How can we give language a larger presence in this creative digital world? How can we give literature and books a larger presence in this world?

**SEARCH ENGINES AND POETRY.**

The Digital Reading Portal is the solution for both the industrialized AND the developing countries. The industrialized (focusing on the United States because the research has been done there) because the issue of language and of literature has nothing to do with state education. It is education during LEISURE TIME, which exceeds classroom time 3:1. By placing a 'literature ad' on the screen each time a search is made, language is given form and beauty. And, though the user cannot be forced to click on the 'QUOAT' to find out more, it has insinuated itself into the daily digital activities--millions of times each day.

For instance, each time the user logs in to a start-up page or types in a search term, up pops a work of literature in the same format. In the case of a search engine, the sample would be matched to the search term and language in the same way commercial advertising is matched. Curious readers will be referred to appropriate websites for further reading, or even to books! Start-up pages may have similar tie-ins: literary "ads" change each day, or for each log-in, depending on the technology.

QUOATS. Since the technology is proprietary, the full capabilities are not yet known, however the technology exists. Perhaps the 'quaat' is matched to the search; as in, "Oxford University" = "Twinkle, twinkle, little bat, How I wonder where you're at?" The nonsense poem written by Oxford professor of mathematics, Charles Dodgeson ; a.k.a., Lewis Carroll. Just two examples give some sense of the potential: A person in Albania, writing in French, types in 'Morocco'. The `quaat' could be from a Moroccan writer who writes in French and Moroccan Arabic (and perhaps other dialects), and clicking on the 'quaat', the user can see the 'quaat' completed in French, also in Arabic, and also in Albanian. This 'click on' or second step is very important, because the Digital Reading Portal does want to lose the user. Direct links to immediate accessibility of the text (gratis), learning opportunities, library opportunities, etc., perhaps competitions would appear on the DRP web page. Perhaps by typing in age, age specific information would be revealed as well.

COMMISSIONS. Another use would be to commission writers to write specifically for the Internet in their language. (And, then, why not visual artists, and musicians.) For example, the San people in South Africa tell stories represented in pictures. This may sound simple, however no new technology by itself is creative. It requires content.

#### LE CIEL FOUNDATION.

In partnership with leaders in digital technology and in discussion with the department of research at the National Endowment for the Arts, Le CIEL Foundation has been developing a project for integrating literature with on-line habits over the last year. Now, the Digital Reading Portal welcomes interest from corporate and public sector partnerships.

During the Ottawa Linux Conference, approximately twenty of the world's best Linux developers (including: Red Hat, EMC, HP, OSDL, IBM) signed on, expressing an interest in advancing and expanding the goals of the Digital Reading Portal's creation (now included in Le CIEL Foundation).

The benefit of the Digital Reading Portal to its partners in technology and media is tremendous. Criticism of the digital/media industries over privacy, education, and public access is growing. Many countries are pressing for stronger privacy laws and regulations of the distribution of pornography. Many companies are caught in endless IP lawsuits, and some, despite great creativity, fold. Most have done a poor job of explaining the public benefits of digital technology.

The Digital Reading Portal helps industry highlight responsible uses of its technologies. Not only to a handful of insiders, but to a massive audience—its own audience—daily. The task is formidable, and important. The Digital Reading Portal recognizes and acknowledges the miracle of new technologies, and provides the missing connection between technology and literacy.

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For additional information on Le CIEL Foundation and its programs, please go to: [www.HansenPartnership.com](http://www.HansenPartnership.com). A NGO, CIEL stands for 'connect in every life' around the world. Christine Hansen is an international expert and leader on e-governance policies and cutting edge technologies, especially open source.

## APPENDIX A. LITERATURE TO YOUTH: A DIGITAL APPROACH

Research on the extent and nature of teen and young adult reading is beginning to accumulate from both public and private sources. Reading scores and literacy rates have been documented for decades, but studies by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Book Industry Study Group, among others, have documented what percentage of (and how frequently) teens and young adults read various materials. The portrait that emerges is that of a generation of young Americans that spends little time reading books for pleasure or enlightenment. Other activities have taken its place, with the result that the knowledge and skills of young adults are slipping to critically low levels.

The problem is felt all across the society. Universities find that 53 percent of entering students must undergo some form of remedial coursework. Small businesses and manufacturers rank poor reading skills as a leading hindrance to productivity and innovation in the workplace. Corporations devote \$3.1 billion per year to remedial writing training for employees. In publishing, unit sales of books fell 23 million in 2003, newspaper reading rates among young adults has fallen from 46 percent in 1972 to 21 percent in 2002, and magazine circulation has dropped by 25 million since 2000.

What do teens and young adults do in their leisure time? Watch television, mostly, but rising quickly are Internet use and video games. Reading has slipped to a mere 8 minutes per day for 15-24-year-olds. Boys play games and computers six times that amount, girls five times that much, and the shift is growing.

Most discussions of reading and digital activities treat them as opposites. This is a futile approach. Nothing will stop the growth of screen habits, nor will the value of books decline. What is needed is a strategy to unite the two, to the benefit of both.

Each day, millions of young adults activate search engines, such as AltaVista, and start-up pages, such as America on Line. They enter chat rooms, check the teen blogs, Instant Message, and surf the Net. In twenty-four hours, students have emailed, searched, searched, emailed, and searched again: at school, at lunch, at recess, on the bus, at work, at home, even in front of the television. Topics for school assignments are 'googled' using the Web as a research tool. Papers, quizzes, gossip, and sports scores are transmitted. American students are professionals in the use of digital interfaces.

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## APPENDIX B. STATEMENT OF SUPPORT BY UNITED STATES NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

When the National Endowment for the Arts issued *Reading at Risk*, it acknowledged that the declines in literary and general book reading in the United States would not be solved by a Federal agency. While the declines were steepest among young adults, the direction was the same for people of all ages, incomes, education levels, regions, races, and gender. This is a problem with deep causes—economic, social, technological, and cultural.

The Arts Endowment, along with other agencies and foundations (including Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Kaiser Foundation) has documented the extent of the problem. Cultural critics and social scientists have speculated widely on the causes of the problem. But as for solutions to the problem, we must look to leading voices in the media, the government, and the private sector. These figures possess either the visibility to influence popular attitudes or the resources to affect the daily consumer behavior of ordinary citizens.

We encourage efforts both public and private to reverse the decline of reading habits, especially among young adults. Furthermore, we are willing to provide information and research that will allow interested parties to understand the nature and depth of the reading problem. As a public service, the Endowment aims to disseminate its research findings as widely as possible, and, as Chairman Gioia stated, help “bring the transformative power of literature into the lives of all citizens.”

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Office of Research and Analysis  
National Endowment for the Arts  
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